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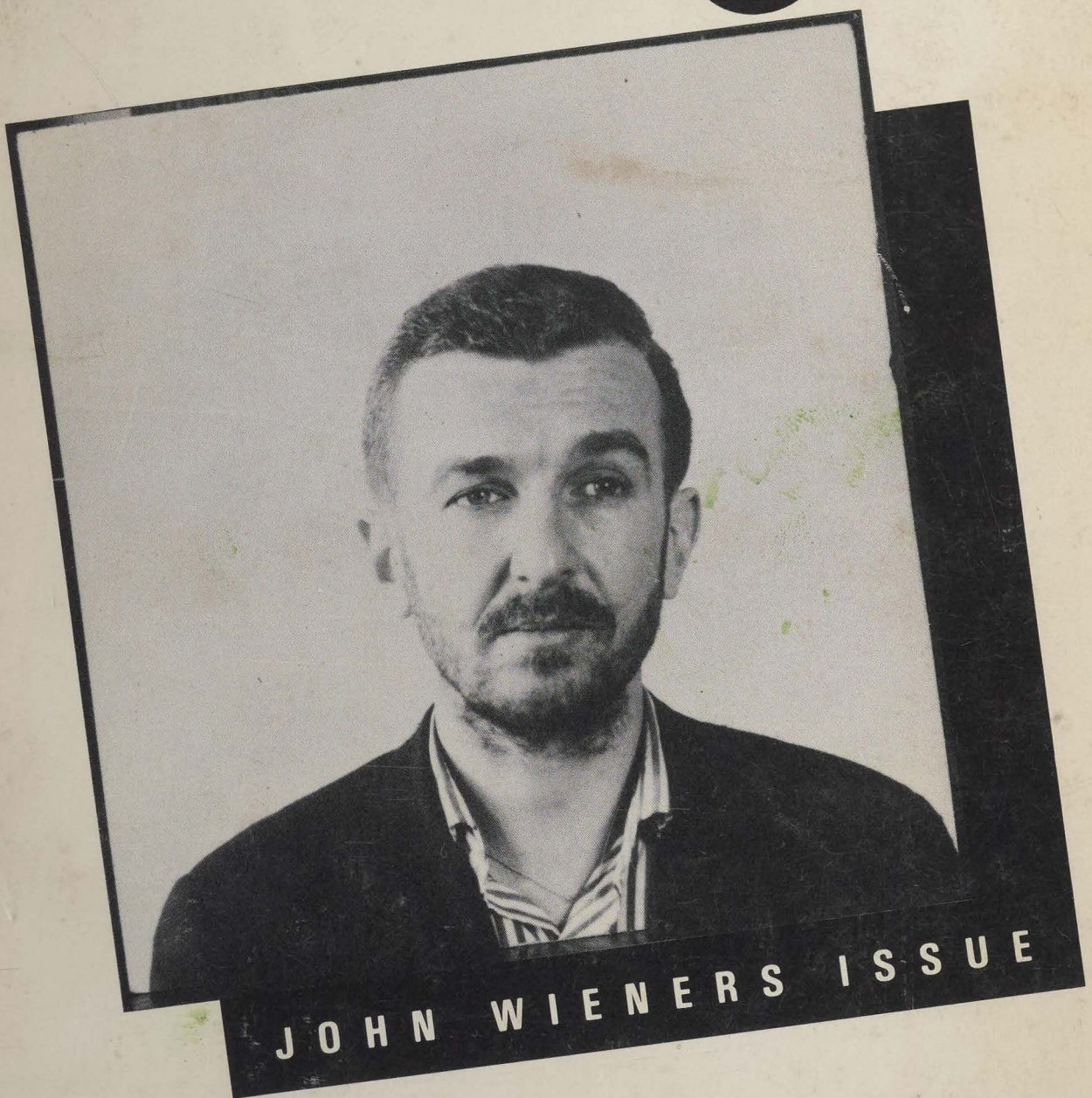

JOHN WIENERS ISSUE

COVER

Woolworth's snapshot of
John Wieners c. 1965-6;
on its obverse he wrote
"To Charles Olson"
(see back cover)

Unpublished holograph;
collection Andrew Crozier

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MIRAGE / "HOMAGE TO WIENERS"

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The Grolier Bookshop, Cambridge, 1967 John Wieners

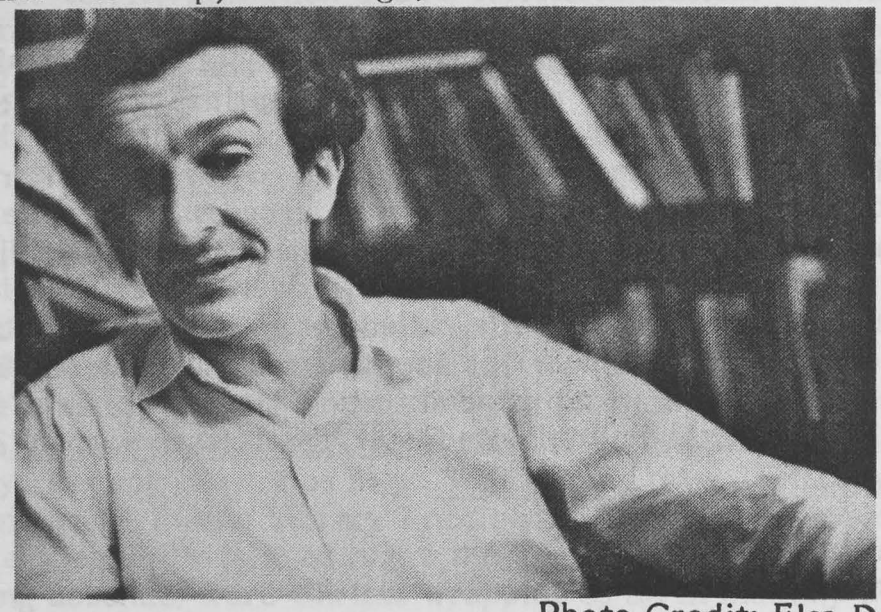


Photo Credit: Elsa Dorfman

STEVE ABBOTT WIENERSCHNITZEL

1.
Piercing the air "like arrows tipped in fire" (Dante) yet with the "simplicity of an ax blow" (Bataille), the cry shimmers like a strobe light, an oscillating/osculating of both horror and eroticism. Indeed the oscillum, a little face or mask hung from a tree and swaying in the wind, could be Wieners' emblem. The face appears obsessively in his early work: "waits for the face to spell out the number of letters in 'I love you' " (Scenes for a Film), "Drawing the face/ and its torture" (A Poem for Painters), "I am/ done with faces/ I have seen before" (A Poem for Early Risers), "let no ache/ screw his face" (A Poem for the Old Man), and culminating in the most horrific of faces, Munch's Scream, "with Munch the most/ obsessed. His face/ carved by knife blades."

Accompanying Wieners' face, horror if not kisses (sometimes both) and a cry: "Oh come back, whatever heart/ you have left." (A Poem for Painters), "Oh Johnny, women in/the night moan yr name" (Act 2).

2.
As intensely focused, vulnerable and "sincere" as these early poems are, their lyricism is not monological. Paintings, older literary or biblical phrases, jazz and the underworld street culture of drugs and prostitution are not quoted so much as witnessed, interrogated, extended. More remarkable, Wieners' heteroglossia -- while important to note at this early date -- grows out of the most rudimentary and unmediated of utterances, the cry. Even the cry is dialogical. Someone's implored, an answer's called for. And the climatic coital gasp or death scream? Here too someone is "hooked" or indebted by the gift/sacrifice of vocal expenditure. Merely to hear is to be irrevocably and sexually implicated: spit, spark, sperm, spank, speak.

3.
Whose cry?

Ginsberg begins Howl in past tense, as witness. "I saw...." His rage, a linear response to his friend's pain. Only as the catalogue of horrors lengthens and adjective piles upon adjective does the bottom fall out into an apparent madcap heteroglossia. Wieners, in "A Poem for Painters" mixes tenses and voices from the start. The stately, almost classical generality of "Our age bereft of nobility/ How may our faces show it?" is abruptly answered by the urgent "I look for love." "I" and the various others addressed or heard (roommate/painter Bob LaVigne, America, etc) change shape in the discourse like amoebas. Wieners' "I," for instance, shifts almost line by line from aristocratic, to romantic, to painterly, to philosophic, to biblical, to landscape-identified, to childlike and so on. But the cry that "boils over" is not merely Wieners'. It is primal, unconscious, collective. "Oh come back, whatever heart/ you have left" is Wieners' own desperate cry on one level, the generic lover's on another, and on still another a Job-like reverberation of the earlier more metaphysical and scatological "Oh stop up/ The drains/ We are run over."

Unlike Ginsberg's howl, Wieners' cry (and his faces too) functions as one of Guattari's "concrete machines," a matrix organizing modes of

subjectivation. Memory enters effecting a mysterization, thus combining de-territorialization and re-territorialization. Wieners' cry thus becomes our own. It propels us into a future, dislodging us from our past by deepening and darkening it. Like a bloodstain on the hotel carpet, it spreads, sinks in.

4.
Dear John,

I'm so tired of being serious now tho the 80's writing scene increasingly demands it. And where's all my fancy French crit vocab gotten me? Into Poetics Journal? Fat chance! I'm too apt to interject SEX into my disourse, or a working-class bluntness, like the pics of boys getting blow jobs in yr Behind the State Capitol (yr only book not in the SF Public Library I noticed). Thus sadness covers our work like a shepherd's tent of night the earth or as if God (bless his excruciating absence) were Christo wrapping us all in mummy white.

Or mommy white. Virgin blue? "What Happened to the Mind of Jennifer Jones" and "Hong Kong Boasts a Hotel for the Dead," my 2 fave titles of yrs, esp. as they apply to sentences introducing paragraph above. So let poetic license grant the bearer of these words all the rights and privileges thereunto appertaining: " 'I'm only asking that I shall be shot with him' said Claretta Petacci, his mistress."

much love,

Steve

5.
As for Wieners' glances into the abyss, isn't it time to call to account those for whom they have only been the object of an eclectic curiosity? Many realities are subject to the law of all or nothing. This is the case with Wieners. The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola would be nothing if they were not mediated in the greatest silence (and mediated, they are a prison without an exit).

What Wieners shattered can only be opened to those carried forward by the need to shatter; the others do to Wieners what they do to everything else: nothing has meaning for them, and everything they touch decomposes. It is a law of present-day life that an ordinary man must be incapable of thinking about anything at all, and be tied down in every way by completely servile occupations, which drain him of reality. But the existence of this man will end up crumbling into dust, and one day he will no longer be astonished when a living being does not see him as the ultimate limit of things.

(from Bataille's Nietzschean Chronicle with Wieners' name replacing Nietzsche's)

6.

When Tomaso dragged Eva back to our table his sweatsoaked shirt was unbuttoned to the waist. His eyes gleamed and his tongue wagged when he laughed. Eva was laughing. Tomaso fell into the chair next to me squeezed the back of my neck smelled like everything I ever wanted.

"Betcha never saw anything like this before." I could feel the heat of his body pulsating wanted to lean over kiss him leaned over he pulled me away. "Whadaya think I am, Queer?"

(randomly chosen section of my nouvella Holy Terror)

Curiosity: from sun up to sun down, around, behold this daze of days to which is given a tension. A find or fugued place. A torsion as in Loyola who set his days on edge by emptying them out. No conceptual body but this body which forgets itself.

One month ago, in Boston, I made love to a man of a roof. It was as if some giant hand grabbed us up and emptied us out. Dangerous nights, stars spilling over a city. And below us, a poet whose work I admire dying of drugs on Joy Street.

(from my poem "Days" extracted from journal entries 7/31 to 8/12/79)

7.

A human being is dissociated when he devotes himself to a useful labor, which has no sense by itself; he can only find the plenitude of total life when seduced. And just as virility is tied to the allure of a nude body, full existence is tied to any image that arouses hope and terror. THE LOVED ONE in this broken-up world has become the only power that has retained the virtue of returning to the heat of life. If this world were not ceaselessly traversed by the convulsive movements of beings who seek each other, if it were not transfigured by the face "whose absence is painful," it would still appear as a mockery to those it causes to be born: human existence would be present there, but only in the form of a memory or of a film of "primitive" countries. It is necessary to exclude fiction, with a feeling of irritation. The lost, the tragic, the "blinding marvel," possessed in one's innermost being, can no longer be met anywhere but on a bed. It is true that satisfied dust and the dissociated concerns of the present world also invade bedrooms; locked bedrooms nevertheless remain, in the almost unlimited mental void, so many islands where the images of life reconstitute themselves.

....

Her reality is as doubtful as a gleam that vacillates, but which the night makes violent.

(from Bataille's The Sorcerer's Apprentice)

M. L. ADAMS LYNETTE #1.

I am waiting in line for a movie at the Castro when I see them in front of the ticket booth. They are leaning towards one another; there is an atmosphere of indecision. The tall one, the one I love,

looks just like she does in the ads. She's even wearing the same outfit. Thick wavy hair, soft toothsome leather jacket, spotted leopard pants. Big heels. Her date motions with a hand and runs off using short steps. This signals a short absence. The woman in leopard print stretch pants walks over to me. Her name is Lynette; we've been introduced. She has a wide mouth and wide eyes; large brown irises. She hands me a folded piece of paper. 'A party,' she says. 'I hope you can make it.' 'This weekend?' She nods. I nod. I put the paper in the pocket of my jeans jacket. She walks back to wait for her date. She puts all her attention into that. I take this as a sign that she's at work.

I bring a friend to the party. I am feeling insecure and my friend has a low, husky laugh. She isn't moved by much. Small and hard like a hazelnut with lovely facial bones. Many people are attracted by her aura of experience.

I recognize some of the women at the party as strippers I've seen at the Baybricks' show. Wrapped up in red or black lace, they are noisy and demonstrative. It's a screen I can't penetrate. I am vaguely uneasy with the amount and variety of drugs being consumed. My friend and I wander through the crowd with cigarettes and glasses of gin.

Sometimes I see Lynette. She's wearing big dark clothes, kind of sloppy looking. I assume this means she's not working. Clothes are conductors in the electrical sense. I want to slip my hand under her shirt.

I am happy when she looks at me. Some sort of recognition, then waiting.

Sitting on the carpet eating a carrot stick. Lynette walks over, quickly nudges me hard under the throat. I lean back on my elbows, her hand slides over my shoulder, presses me down. I feel very hot, I think this is what I want except I also want to finish my carrot stick. She is sucking my neck, which has become soft and elastic.

In my mind I say, 'I am the beloved of the whore with a heart of gold.'

'But I don't love you' she says.

'You're some other whore' I say.

I'm only doing this because my beloved is unavailable.

She comes back from the conference with Debbie, a woman I am jealous of. They are agreeing that the conference was peculiar: paying eight dollars to hear one male psychiatrist present his handling of a case while two others attack him in minute detail. I am curious whether the psychiatrists, by attacking one another, can come to be on the side of the client, who is female. Then, if one changes his position, does his relationship to the client also change, or is this fixed. . .

I'm not in the habit of revealing my thoughts. I say, 'The difference between being middle class and being the way I was before is now I can hire friends to clean my house.'

MICHAEL AMNASAN [ON THE HOTEL WENTLEY POEMS]

On the cover of The Hotel Wentley Poems is a man's dark silhouette under a street light, a forlorn image which seems appropriate as a complement to the poems within the book, which in no way resemble this stark image and yet somehow suggest it as lying outside the poetic line. The lines in a face, in the palm of a hand, an artist scratching tirelessly on a surface passing from stark to livid, lines which never pass through the surface of the page from which they're read. Wieners offers no deep, carefully remembered incidents. He reaches for the sublime presentness of poetic observation as if to move beyond narrative toward an original discourse, to take from God, forces we have no control over, a momentary escape from temporal estrangement. The space of this moment remains as an artefact from 1958 (the year the poems were written). Expressions like open thy mouth and Yeah stand now combine to express a world of temporal estrangement.

A horrific ambiguity lies outside economics, a negative presence of such ominous proportions that we can do little but laugh at the enormity of our shapelessness, discover new limitations in projects with no set terms, or seek love in dark places in the shadow of the overdeveloped temporalities of work places.

Robert Alexander (l) and John Wieners, San Francisco, 1958.
Collection David Meltzer

"Four souls lookin' for hebbin"

John was the "Absolute Poet" and spoke for so many of us thru his words. There is a special space in our hearts where John rests forever.

ROBERT ALEXANDER
April, 1985

Wieners renders fright as a sensational still life, the imprint of the sublime. This is Jean-Francois Lyotard's breakdown of the sublime sensation. "A very big, very powerful object threatens to deprive the soul of any and all 'happenings,' stuns it (at lower intensities, the soul is at this point seized with admiration, veneration, respect). The soul is dumb, immobilized, as good as dead. Art by distancing this menace, procures a pleasure of relief, of delight. Thanks to art, the soul is returned to the agitated zone between life and death, and this agitation is its health and its life."

In "A poem for painters" Wieners writes of drawing the face/ and its torture. Later in the same poem.... of our skin, knowing/ that so much flows through/ the veins underneath./ The cheeeks puffed with it./ Our pockets full. Wieners doesn't set up a mood to support whatever feelings he writes of. The result might be a delirious estrangement, and yet his lines are more substantial than writing intended to synchronize feeling with particular remembered events. Love seems to come out of nowhere as a shift in direction rather than a conviction of caring. It is not value synchronized toward an incontestable memory. Wieners rejects the vocation of remembering, and it is for this reason that the feelings expressed within his poems are set in opposition to any expedient summary of a life. Love is both miraculously true and glaringly false. Rather than stay with this contradiction it may be more practical to call it "something to work at" and move on to other matters -- but Wieners hesitates before the moment until it becomes intensely chromatic.

I think of the film In the White City directed by Alain Tanner. In the first scene the main character, Paul, is shown to correct a problem in the engine room of an oil tanker, with an easy efficiency he appears to enjoy (the vocation of memory as an uplifting dance with alienation the machine which keeps the ship running smoothly). Shortly after this scene in which every cog and piston is choreographed perfectly, we see Paul walking away from the ship, on leave, entering the ambiguity of the potentially poetic, the white city, free time as a negative of what in work is graphically laid out and temporally determined. Because there is no script for the actors to follow, content lacks the formal arrangement of Wieners' poetic line. The efficiency Paul turns away from becomes a frame or force

of economic reality which compresses content into an intense shapelessness. We see a culture within which vocation is not located within the ambiguity of a life, but rather defines the content of a life, makes a vehicle for that content, a sign-function which guarantees greater mobility. And all that is apparent in its absence, in Paul as an actor without a script, without a strong stylistic through which to validate his presence. I felt embarrassed for this forcedly imcomplete character as he was shown walking down a street. Could this be what Lyotard describes as the soul having been stunned? The menace of a shapeless freedom is made distant by its projection onto the screen.

Barrett Watten writes, in regard to the work of Robert Smithson, "Each unit of housing in the suburbs might be likened to an atomized spasm of hilarity. Such, indeed, would be the case at the moment of their arrival on the scene, a moment of estrangement that Smithson wants to perpetuate through this structural metaphor of crystallization in entropic time -- the moment of the artist's estrangement on arrival." The construction of tract homes is rush work. Since each unit of housing is nearly identical it's possible to estimate how long it will take to finish each one. With the effort to pack as many work-efficient movements as possible into each unit of time, whether scaled as a minute, an hour, or a day, temporality becomes overdetermined. Any prolonged indeterminacy then feels obstructive to some primary project. Smithson's crystallization in entropic time may be considered a metaphor for a minimal construct robbed of temporality by the entire process of its construction.

Wieners doesn't offer a metaphor for estrangement, but its metaphorical dispersement, salvation through the enlarged scale of a moment. "A poem for record players" is the projection of Wieners' marginality as a sublime expanse of sensation. oh clack your/ metal wings, god, you are/ mine now in the morning./ I have you by the ears/ in the exhaust pipes of a/ thousand cars, gunning/ their motors turning over/ all over town. Imagine the internalized expediency of each of a thousand people preparing to head off to work, the noise from the exhaust pipes of their cars crystallized within, and giving space to Wieners' poem. God would seem a transcendent perception which Wieners has stolen in order to transform estrangement into a

sensation artifact. We dot not see inside the cars, but hear their smallness, their one/thousandth part of Wieners' broad projection. The potentially poetic which I would like to feel labor to lie within is irreconcilably bracketed off from a workaday world, a different viewpoint altogether. Only as an artifact does The Hotel Wentley Poems extend beyond affectation. Initially Wieners's lines may feel exaggerated -- at least until a distance is felt. This is not a distance from any apparent menace, but the potential distance of the book which can be taken into hand or put aside. The affection need not be judged on the spot and the strong syntax of Wieners' work emerges and subdues the loaded terms which fill out the poem.

DODIE BELLAMY NOT CLINICAL BUT PROBABLE: A TRIBUTE TO JOHN WIENERS

His teeth were rotting; his matted hair stuck out like an irregular porcupine; I was 24 and unblemished and I fucked his brains out because he recited Yeats as we watched the sun rise over San Francisco's skyline from his big smelly bed. Besides, he was a professional poet -- even his caked fingernails were numinous.

The night we met he drove me home with a kiss and a copy of his book. Neither of us would admit the route to my building so the five minute drive took half an hour. A few days later I called him from my drafting table at Wells Fargo Bank (I didn't last there long because of the rip in the ass of my jeans), "Hi, I had a dream about you." He knew I wanted to fuck so he said, "How about Saturday around dinner?"

When I got to his place I just couldn't. He was forty years old and started to cry, so I hugged him. Putty warm and forbidden because the boundaries were olfactory and therefore fleeting -- a chemical change in my perceptions as if sinking right through his plaid shirt to something dark and confusing like molasses without its stick . . . Afterwards I was starving but he never offered me any food.

The remembrance of a body odor -- after ten years there is only recognition cultivated or avoided. Schizophrenic: I sniff one in an

elevator, toe nails so long they curl back into his feet. The smell of a brain on fire or some deep molecular awakening like the children at the end of Four-Gated City; I bet their armpits had a distinctly pungent aroma.

Naked before his elevator door he did a jig and serenaded me on his guitar. See how his hairy jewels jingle like loose change.

He didn't have a kitchen table so I sprawled on his bed in my purple drawstring pants, black leotard and white overblouse with Bambi embroidered on the left pocket. I had a Mary Travers hairdo -- blonde hair to the middle of my back and bangs. Surrounded by empty bookcases I stared at the one with the plastic nativity scene on top, hoping that this time "dinner" meant food. The Virgin Mary's face was peeling when he emerged from the kitchen with two plates covered by raw steak. The red secretion against the white china reminded me of my period but at least the blood between my thighs was warm. He took a huge bite, tiny crimson bubbles beading his lower lip. Maybe if I was starving in the Arctic . . . I set it on the floor and looked out the window not really seeing anything. He said, "How about some peanut butter?" and brought out a jar of Skippy and a spoon.

Holding his breath he puckered his lips then released them with a quick forceful exhalation and said there wasn't any difference between fearing execution and being executed.

blood is the water-
color
they use to turn on.

The traffic outside sounded like an ocean with an occasional honk. Hotel room on Kearny and Broadway -- he would stay there for a week or two, his version of a cottage in Vermont. The bars and neon lights flashed new synapses in a tired mind. That night he wore one of those thick cream colored sweaters from Ireland -- Fisherman's knit -- because his favorite Bible story was the King Fisher. When he took it off we made love on the sagging twin bed. No sheet on the thin blue striped mattress . . . two images kept intruding upon my carnal

pleasure: "prison cell" and "lice." A sink dripped in the corner and an old Italian coughed in the next room. We were doing it missionary but don't think this moment is conservative. His fucking was as messy as his clothes; sometimes he would murmur, "You have a delicious body" and I felt like I was being slurped. His rhythm was more of a spiral than the typical push-pull. But it worked -- I would come lying on my back, legs spread wide; I've never done that with anyone else. It's frightening that way -- nothing to grab onto. A line was inching down my navel and when it hit my clit it would split open spilling forth a mass of gleaming red a la Cronenberg. I was holding my breath thinking, "I can't stand it" when he said, "Come on my dear, come for me." And I did but I was so pissed I was a grenade wanting to blow his cock off -- how dare he interfere with my moment.

I wrote him on ice colored paper in an ice colored envelope, "I'm the girl of the ballads -- alive or ghostly my long plait of hair getting wet on the moors, it only happens once and then you die, but that can be multiple too like an orgasm but you wouldn't know because being male you're not supposed to have them or do you?"

He sat in his wooden arm chair and smoked two cigarettes at a time, one in each hand his head rocking back and forth. I was silent as I watched crosslegged from his bed. The sheets had never been washed, all gray and smelling not so much funky as strange -- as if the essence of schizophrenia had been extracted into a perfume like your own armpits or gas, something repulsive that you want to inhale.

I am infused with the day even tho the day may destroy me.

My friends say if this is a tribute it should be gay. Or its opposite. Sigmund Freud: paranoia is repressed homosexuality. I suggest a neuter narrator. And then he stroked my genitalia, then he fucked my nether orifice.

Fingering the scars on his naked body, the frail ones on wrist throat cheek knee; pink fissures too smooth for skin, polished and therefore a conversation piece. <u>There are bandages on the wounds/ but blood flows unabated</u>. Everything is self-inflicted: autopsy ridges across his pale and softly heaving chest.

He was starving so he wrote lean poems.

He stood at the foot of my stairs and yelled up, "I didn't make myself clear, you can't leave me alone!" I felt like Ginger Rogers rushing into his arms. We didn't dance but took a walk past a deserted construction site. I exclaimed, "You're really insecure!" and asked him about the night he agreed with the paperback astrologer: Capricorn sun/Aries moon: self-sufficient controlled aloof. He looked at the lot full of cut pine and nails poking everywhere in odd directions (though I was still there because I held his arm or at least I wanted to) and he said, "Oh that was just a shadow. Most things are." It was only the next day when I recollected the incident in tranquillity that I realized: after midnight this was a dangerous occupation.

Sipping Jack Daniels from a champagne glass, he said the only reason he was alive was because he didn't know enough anatomy to find his jugular vein.

I sat on the toilet blue jeans wrinkled around my ankles, staring at my pink bikini panties the cotton crotch stained from some period of unknown date or origin -- its simple vulnerability reminded me of him. I had love once in the palm of my hand. See the lines there. My body was operating according to principles it wasn't communicating to me: I craved the taste of sulphur, my chest broke out in hives whenever I heard the Beach Boys, especially "Surfin' Safari." And then it dawned on me a realization so obvious it could have been my mother: NATURAL LAWS ARE JUST A STATE OF MIND. If this were a movie there would be swirling colors and I would take on the facial characteristics of an ape. Again to smell what this calm ocean cannot tell us. Raising his head from between my thighs his cheeks glistening (I was leaking on him for a change) he sniffed and said, "My dear you're going to make a great poet!"

Then he took my sexual organ(s) in his mouth; his cock was a lot bigger than mine, though it reminded me of myself.

He always played the fool, the innocent . . . his mouth an "O" like an

anus and smelling as bad, a big belly laugh, "And Ferlinghetti had to sit there and take it because everybody in the room knew I was crazy!"

We sat at his "desk," a blonde picnic bench lit by this grotesquely smiling ovum a foot wide: blue jacket red bow tie, perched on the proverbial wall. I kept thinking humanoid but not quite born A former wife had found it in a thrift store. That, a Guatemalan blanket and the poems he incessantly dedicated to her were the sum total of her remains. He handed me his latest, blue ballpoint on lined paper ripped from a spiral binder, the script shakey as if written with the wrong hand, each three-lined stanza creeping a little farther to the right. I could make out 75% of it and one complete thought: "We lived near the East river over/ a laundromat, taking the West bound bus/ to work. Glory and grand illusory spectacles." Lit by that glowing bald dome his own hair poked out like a crown (he always looked like he was still in bed), brown wisps stuck to his beaded forehead, sweat so profuse a person could drink from his frontal lobe. He had removed his glasses preferring the world blurred -- it helped him be crazy. After all, that was his profession; any visible signs of improvement could cost him thousands a year. But that wasn't likely, not as often as he was committed -- for running naked down Haight Street or driving on the grass of Golden Gate Park with a 4-year-old friend steering the wheel. He wouldn't sleep for six weeks and then he'd be rolling around the hospital floor; he begged them not to but the doctors gave him drugs that made him howl like a bear with its foot crushed in a rusty metal mouth.

After all, I am possessed
by wild animals and
long haired men and
women who gallop
breaking over my beloved
places.

He summed up his theory of poetics in a single word: confusion.

He was 365 years old, having met a magician in the Black Forest who gave him eternal life. But that didn't mean he couldn't be murdered.

There were voices on the radio plotting his destruction. We were in bed together, a sudden clamp around my arm, his fingers squeezing to bruise, he sat up, "You believe me don't you?" Nodding furiously, "Of course I believe I understand I mean why not?"

He could have been Jack Nicholson with an axe and I was lying beside him naked.

I wrote him on pink paper in a pale blue envelope: "It's all about an edge to be up against."

And yet, we must remember.
The old forest, the wild
screams in the backyard
or cries in the bedroom.

Rocking back and forth, the way blind people are taught not to do he gave a shrill laugh then froze suddenly, a statue with darting brown eyes. His jeans were baggy and his green turtleneck stained. I thought the hair matted out in all directions from lack of washing, but once I was there when he shampooed -- it automatically dried in the same neo-expressionistic configuration.

He bent over and I spread the cheeks of his ass, that tight little pout; then I stuck something inside, moving it back and forth in a vigorous fashion.

After his reading at Intersection he met a woman, and barely so she being nineteen and the kind that throws her long brown hair in her face to hide something ordinary like a nose or an idea. When she paid for his book with a Susan B. Anthony silver dollar he called me up hyperventilating, "That means she's a feminist and wants to kill me!"

Their long hair binds them,

They have lain long
hours in bed, blood
on their mouths, arms
reaching down for

ground not given them.

His friends were over and I was embarrassed to be the only person in the room who had never attempted suicide. If you really want to succeed you slice the vein up the arm and not across. Otherwise you wake up in the psyche ward your hands numb and unable to withstand the pressure of a pencil, though typing is all right for a short while. He was always rushing his friends off to the hospital. Once when he drove up to Mendocino to rescue a fighting couple he couldn't decide if it was proper to take them to different hospitals or the same one.

I wrote him on beige paper in a yellow envelope, "You drink your friends' sadness like wine but it's not clear if you like the taste." But I didn't mean his friends, I meant me.

Sniffing my body is a simple word: woman.

He autographed his book in black in framing the words with little hearts and musical notes:
"For Dodie --
'a young frost
makes her first sketches
on the panes of my cabin'
A great writer and a true love
from now until heaven --"

Betty had been in therapy since she was born. When her divorce was finalized she was so depressed she wanted to sleep with me. Fingering my hair in the supermarket line she blurted out, "Dodie, let's start a lesbian nation." So I said, "Go over and fuck him and he'll tell you you're a good writer." She did and he did and it was obvious he liked her better than me. She would take her clothes off and run around his apartment yelling, "Don't try to touch me. Right now I just can't deal with sex!" He would follow her, begging. Neither one of them knew the difference between static and a wavelength.

The poem/ does not lie to us. We lie under/ its laws, alive in the glamour of this hour . . . I write as if this didn't bother me. Not true -- I found it disgusting. But it had its moments.

He sucked various parts of my body.

I was "in love" with him -- at twenty-four I could still tell a person that. Any more I'd rather have my lips fall off. I was also in various stages of affairs with Bruce Janis Gary and Lynn. My love was totally devoid of understanding and therefore limitless. He said I had the typical attitude of a young poet -- life wasn't something to live but to devour. My conversation was a barrage of details each one more sparkling than the last. He would occasionally interrupt to say, "That's a good line." He made me feel so special my jaws cramped from smiling. Now that I'm no longer a poet I spend my Thursday evenings with Kevin, the editor of this magazine. We watch Hill Street Blues and he gives me a punch of Tab and Gallo Hearty Burgundy. It tastes like cough medicine but I drink it because he does. There's a lot to think about but not much to say. Kevin lent me his sister Maureen's Humpty Dumpty lamp and his roommate Dinah's picnic table, like an old odor not in substance but effect.

That love is my strength, that
I am overpowered by it:
desire
that too
is on the face: gone stale.

Pastiche as in what does this have to do with anything. He should have grown flowers in me, instead he bled me. My skin was so white it eluded the lamplight and crept out to the stars.

One evening our conversation was boring in a subtle sort of way -- he was plotting his next letter to Ken Kesey or calculating which relatives if any had money to leave him -- and I realized a crazy person can be mundane. Suddenly the enchantment was broken and I had the fishy taste in my mouth you get from kissing a frog. There was no need for him to leave me, but he said I was the kind of girl a man would have to marry and he could never do that. At that time marriage was like pregnancy, a physical impossibility, so I never bothered with birth control or hiding my feelings. Boy was I in for a big surprise . . .

BRUCE BOONE JOHN WIENERS, AMERICAN POET

To be troubled by doubts is violence,
voices. When the light's not on, the dark.
Where we go for sex gleams in the bushes.
Forms of it accumulate like mushrooms. A
place of crossover. In this or that
invaders gleam so handsomely. Not bilateral
not ours but a radial symmetry. The male
householder seems hostile, I saw him there,
many legs, arms, inattentive. The voices
sweet statistical like bats flying,
ones you saw in the basement. Strange!
Don't look for us in the attic, dear, they
mock and cruelly chime. No one's a bozo,
are they? You're on the other side, ahead,
like him. These shoes spattered by gauze.
Messy spores drift down from stars.
Philosophical, I see in doorways. Shapes.
That I see. Stars unwind. Being him.

WILLIAM CORBETT JOY STREET: A VIEW OF JOHN WIENERS IN BOSTON

Joy Street, directed by G.W. Pabst and set in an old city on the Atlantic, a brick city stony and cold, where the poet in perpetual torment seeks out the love that will evade him when found. The world has nothing for him: no love that lasts; no drug that is without penalty; no curse that will not damn him. He cruises a barroom where the whores and the men who dress as women and the pushers wear ropes of gold and the thin crust of yesterday's makeup. This is Berlin in 1925 and San Francisco in 1957 and the Lower East Side of New York in 1963. The film is lit by neon, smoke and a crummy satin shine. The poet returns to the haunts of the city intent upon his quest and alive in the glamour and the pity that shadow his failures, that are outriders carrying him through the waste lots and desolate windy places at four in the morning or in the first false blue of dawn bleeding to death over moonlit goblets. This poet desires to coarsen

his life in the service of love and beautiful verses. He returns to the sooty Atlantic city of his adolescence where he dreamt a thousand murky dreams and now imagines himself in Venice. In this city he pursues his fate as his fate pursues him and he is uncomplaining even as he pleads for the music of verse to stop his ears and rise from his lips. There are youths in his life and men who are briefly lovers. Johnny steals off with the poet's morphine and Dana ... This film might be a melodrama were it not for the poet's acceptance of the fate he courts. He wants it this way and will have it no other. Abuse, lust and degradation prove his service and inspire the verse which brings treasured order and the promptings of salvation. The film is black and white and silent. The poet and the other actors keep their heads up and act with their eyes. Under the camera's law he remember calla lillies, a glass of flat ale, the poet's split upper lip, stained cotton sheets, leftovers on a plate, two crusted spoons, a freshly shaven armpit ...

* * *

The real Joy Street on which John Wieners has lived for over ten years runs steeply down the wrong side of Beacon Hill. This is the side away from Mount Auburn Street and Louisburg Square, the side behind the Bullfinch state capitol building. This is the area of Beacon Hill whose streets are narrow, dark and awkwardly turning as alleys. Wieners' apartment is not far from the Charles Street Meeting House (now a group of stores on its ground floor and an architect's office and home occupying the rest of the building) where Wieners heard Charles Olson read on the night of hurricane Hazel in 1954. It was after that reading that Wieners went to study at Black Mountain, a choice, Wieners once said, that might have been different if someone else had offered him a roof and the wherewithal to apprentice himself as a poet.

Who will make a coherent history of poetry in Boston during this century? Amy Lowell: Eliot-Aiken-Stevens at Harvard and Aiken later living in Charlestown and toward the end of his life stopping for a few weeks on Newbury Street: the fabulous eccentric and vatic poet John Wheelwright who was run over by a truck on Commonwealth Avenue in the mid-forties: Jack Spicer breaking the spine of a Bay

State Psalm Book while working at the Boston Public Library -- Spicer, Steve Jonas and Wieners form a constellation though their Boston years are largely unknown: Robert Lowell teaching at Boston University and later at Harvard: Delmore Schwartz at Harvard and John Berryman living briefly on Beacon Hill: Ashbery, Kenward Elmslie, Adrienne Rich, Creeley, Bly, Koch, Frank O'Hara passing through Harvard during the late forties and early fifties: Cid Corman's "Origin": Charles Olson and Elizabeth Bishop visited but their imaginations were elsewhere as was that of John Wieners during much of his early career as a poet: Alice James Press: Gail Mazur's Blacksmith House Reading Series: Stratis Haviaris' curatorship of Harvard's Woodbery Poetry Room: the present visitors Derek Walcott and Seamus Heaney.

Edmund Wilson, whose ear again and again struck tin when reviewing modern poetry, wrote this about Robert Lowell in 1963:

> "As for poetry, aside from the older poets, the only one I really read is Robert Lowell -- I mean, the only American poet. He has done something extraordinary; he has made poetry out of modern Boston. He spares nothing of its dinginess and ugliness and vulgarity."

Yes, Lowell saw dinginess and ugliness and vulgarity, but he saw from on high and lay down the law. John Wieners has also seen and recorded the dingy, ugly and vulgar that is as much a part of Boston as it is any American city if one looks away (well, they <u>are</u> the very image of vulgarity!) from the towering banks and the shopping baubles, away from the Faneuil Hall marketplaces, the Copley Plazas and recently risen, most within the past fifteen years, stolid giants of commerce and industry. Lowell looked with his patrician eye nand wrote in the violent accents native to him. Wieners has always been a poet of the underclass who has sought poetry as much for relief, for the home and tenderness he believes it brings to the world, as he has followed it as a destiny unforgiving and implacable in its demands. In Wieners' case this underclass is homosexual and drug addicted, haunted by its desires, but he knows the poor as well, those to whom life has disclosed few graces. Wieners is as much a poet of the barren, the weedy junk-strewn vacant lot that is never far from the

heart of America as was William Carlos Williams. And like Williams, Wieners is not a poet of bitterness, but one of reconciliation, of love and grief and not one without the other. This is the lyric Wieners of Ace of Pentacles, Nerves, the Selected Poems and back to that supremely beautiful sequence The Hotel Wentley Poems. It is the quality of the emotion and the sublime ease of craft that repays and redoubles the reader's attention. Wieners pays fealty to poetry as if he were a knight in its service, as if poetry is worth that attendance if we are to be worthy of its attention. Unabashedly romantic, and if fed like many a twentieth century imagination by the movies, Wieners' vision is no less real for that. More real perhaps for the indomitable spirit, that rightness of instinct and execution, that is at the core of his work. Wieners is a poet who with hard won grace has come through!

* * *

Boston's afternoon pink
glow seems to rise
from the floor of streets.
"Clouds scared me."
What a childhood!
That's Art Pepper talking.
What a life!
Music, heroin, prison
and a moral code
based on cleanliness
and never being a "rat."
What will the fare
be for the '80's?
"A Year, a Decade"
the Revelution Books

window placard promises
"OF HISTORIC IMPORTANCE"
and right they are.
There is the food
calendar. January --
black radishes. April -- leeks.
Vegetables lit erotically
some shot in soft-
focus like movie stars.
The Kliban cat calendar.
His wily cat (Wily
cat? Is that like
"He must smell
my dog on me"
when you reach to
pet a dog and
the dog sniffs you?)
waits on a tree branch
wearing a bird's beak.
And Ellen's gift
the calendar with
red earth colored
Navajo blanket patterns
above the months.
"Poetry," John Wieners
told me, "is no longer

on my calendar."
John, beautiful poet
kind and formal man,
who served me creme de menthe
in gold rimmed goblets
and a plate of carrots,
shrugged and seemed relieved.

ROBERT CREELEY [ON WIENERS' SELECTED POEMS: 1958-1984]

John Wieners is the greatest poet of emotion I have ever read. I know of no poet more articulate or precise in his revelation of human feeling. He is the consummate poet of love for my generation.

SAM D'ALLESANDRO ALL I WANT IS TO DIE FAMOUS

Naked in the blinding machine at Today's Tan, doing my best to get a good burn before Rio, I can't help thinking -- like always -- this time about Carol Wayne drowning in Acapulco. Carol Wayne: actress, gameshow celebrity, Hollywood resident. I read in the obituary that she'd done the Carson show over 200 times. She couldn't even swim they say so why was she out in the water all alone? That's what I'd like to know. I wonder if she was as burned at the time as I'm becoming now in this nuclear coffin at Today's Tan. Maybe she just had to cool off, swim or not. On the way out they hand me a flyer, 'Coming Soon: No Limits, No Liabilities, No Reasons, just what everybody needs in TODAY'S WORLD.' 'Today's World' (in caps) as opposed to yesterday's I guess or as opposed to tomorrow's world. I didn't quite get it. I figure the present is passing on to innovation so quickly anyway why bother with it? That's what I think. Maybe that's what Carol Wayne was thinking.

Question: how many Wheel of Fortunes, how many 20 Million Dollar Pyramids, how many Johnny Carson appearance does a girl have to do

before she's a star? She found the answer scribbled in black lipstick on the back of a bleache de peroxide bottle on a filthy beach in Acapulco, following the pert and perky tilt and bob of the plastic container back out on the waves to a death sea. Scene: ambulance, crowd, attendants, body, all under an azure sky. A remarkable quality of light here. Motion: the ambulance begins to move up and down in a rhythm, push, lift, push, lift, as the young attendant tries to press life back into the siliconed chest. Is this getting too down? This is what Hollywood dreams are made of. Ask anyone.

In an out-of-the-way restaurant in downtown L.A., not far from West Hollywood, poured cement tables, poured cement walls, poured cement floors, pink lighting and a jagged fish tank, the drinks are expensive and the location dangerous. I came in here to soak up some atmosphere and immediately I'm annoyed wishing there was a television set or someone drunk enough to entertain or something. Ambience alone is not enough to drain my tension. There are times when reality is best ignored, I know that, I'm no dummy, I have learned from the mistakes of others. Life is no bowl of cherries, especially here in Glamourville. Witness: Mary Hartman, cancellation her only reward for coping with every creeping crisis known to the suburban dweller; Jo Ann Castle, fired after 30 years on Lawrence Welk (contract no good no more); the Monkees' screaming slide from top of the 60's throwaway culture heap to the slimy pit of media burnout (two short years in the making); Frank Gifford, actor, athlete, stud, laughing all the way to the bank, castrated amidst a nightmare of chocolate brown and toilet bowl white Frigidaire refrigerators (all recorded on videotape); Carol Wayne found dead on the beach in a glitzy Mexico resort town.

She said: I'm gonna make it in this town if it kills me. My name's gonna be in that god damn cement in front of that stupid theater if I have to pour the shit myself. Listen, there's more than one way to get ahead in this business and I'm going to try them all. Tell me who to fuck and I will fuck fuck you fuck the public let them cram ME down their throats for awhile. All I want is to die famous -- there's nothing else to do as far as I can tell.

At Venice Beach it's a party of new dolphin stretch speedos, suntan oil

and bikini combs. These boys won't even go near the water, let alone the girls. There's a retarded man in white jockey underwear that he keeps bunching up around his waist so that his balls hang out. He's talking to us but we don't know what he's saying. We feel sorry for him but we wish he'd go away, no he's not with us, everyone, announcement -- we don't know him we don't usually even come to this beach we're not even from here. There's no stronger reality amidst these piles of constructed bodies than a retarded man with his balls exposed -- this is HOLLYWOOD. This is where Carol Wayne became a star, lived, dieted, did the Wheel of Fortune, met Johnny Carson, took off for Acapulco. This is where she'll be buried and remembered even after the 20 Billion Dollar Period has hit network bankruptcy. We loved her live now we'll love her dead. Here it's all the same, only better.

ALAN DAVIES "AN HARDNESS PROMPTS LITERATURE"

John Wieners, BEHIND THE STATE CAPITOL OR CINCINATTI PIKE, The Good Gay Poets, Box 277 Astor Sta., Boston MA 02123, 1975, $4.95 paper

Additional quotes from

ACE OF PENTACLES, James F. Carr & Robert A. Wilson, 1964
ASYLUM POEMS, Angel Hair Books, 1969
NERVES, Cape Goliard/Grossman, 1970
The Lanterns Along The Wall, Other Publications, 1972
WOMAN, The Institute of Further Studies, 1972

John has lived behind the state capitol, on Beacon Hill, for three years. The writing in this book covers that period, and reaches back into notebooks and magazines in his apartment to locate work which continues to contribute to the present fabric. The title page contains this list: "Cinema decoupages; verses, abbreviated prose insights." The decoupages were constructed by John of pieces taken from magazines and tabloids; there are also photos and parts of photos reproduced. The prose works are about movies, movie stars and celebrities, John's childhood and family, his youth, Charles Olson, murders in New York, gay attitudes, monied people and money, madness and

incarceration, political power, his travels.

The first poem sets a tone of hopelessness, the mind clogged with volumes of memory always there. It is difficult for the poet to survive the world dominated by reason; the mass of memory does not permit reason, or it blots it out. He says, "Sort of Greek canapes color my memories." Pieces of memory obscured by crackers! His memories have been "maimed occasionally", broken into by sadness or guilt, any thing contributing pain to any memory. He said in The Lanterns Along the Wall "that each man does have his own language, particular to himself." That language cripples as it perfects. The poet finds himself broken in his life; he cracks the language to get through.

Sensations clean the mind of will. Recalled sensations -- bits of reading, incident, feeling -- are permitted as poetry to reenter the poet's life, after regaining his attention. Through the poetry, to perhaps get more to the present; getting possibility without, simply, repetitions.

Poetry comes out of the body. It is a sexual thing, something the poet spends years learning to erect. It is his passion. As such a force "it isn't always what one says as content in his work" that matters. For John what finally matters is a quality of diction, language never as refuge, always performance into and out from the poet, publicizing the ego.

* * *

The book is autobiographical in two ways: it strenuously keeps record of the poet's emotional life, and it reflects the emotional life of the state. He sometimes thinks through the mind of the wealthy and famous, also through memories of a poor classless life. The wealthy and famous and powerful are objects of fascination, as they are a magnet to the poor, but they are also objects of scorn. "Enforced biography serves as a boon, respect in terms or regard that youth, in the future, who speaks without knowing." His main intent is not to be a conscience; he takes it as responsibility to leave personal record so others will speak from more than their own knowledge.

Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis Billie Holiday Alida Valli Barbara Hutton Lana Turner Marilyn Monroe Mata Hari Jennifer Jones. There are persons that recur; voices from which he addresses repeatedly. THE ACE OF PENTACLES (1964) was dedicated FOR THE VOICES. In WOMAN he says, "Wealthy born, I aspire to Marlene Dietrich, Judy Garland, Garbo and Lana Turner, all multi-millionaires and male-oriented." Also: Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel John Giorno Robert Creeley Charles Olson Allen Ginsberg Frank Sinatra Elizabeth Monroe Barbara Stanwyck Dante Greta Garbo Simone de Beauvoir Bette Davis Joan Crawford Virginia Valli Ailsa Mellon Bruce Francoise Sagan Virgil Saint Bernadette Marlene Dietrich Blessed Virgin.

Texts he mentions are also a sketch of the scope of his mind: Enquirer; Whitman's poems to MANHATTAN; The National Examiner; "After the Pleasure Party" by Herman Melville; A Curriculum of the Soul, WOMAN, Fasicle Three; Time; The Spy Who Came In From the Cold; The Looking Glass War; ANONYMOUS DIARY OF A NEW YORK YOUTH; Vogue; Across the River and Into the Trees; To Have and Have Not; Les Pavillions.

And, to accompany the stars, some movies: The Miracle of the Bells, The White Mountain, Third Man, Weep No More, Sweet Bird of Youth, Cass Timberlane, Jonny Eager, The Postman Always Rings Twice, A King's Story, The Two Ms. Carroll's, Mr. Skeffington, If I Die Before I Wake, Flamingo Road, The Flower Thief, Queen Sheba Meets the ATom Man.

The movie writing is sometimes camp (he calls Barbara Hutton, "Babs"). In places, mingled with language that jumps hectically from angle to angle, it produces a zany and laughable humor, particularly when John gives a reading.

The most sustained work of camp has Greta Garbo interviewed by Simone de Beauvoir. It ends:

GG: I dunno. It's gone beyond.
SdeB: Desire? (A long, as usual awkward glance, generated by the unmentioned escorT reimburses the tacking of these

relations.) S O B E R, H A Rried and T-continent.
GG: Fruitlessly.
SdeB: You've been too kind. Over simplification aligns aspersion, a good jostling now and again never hurts anyone. I receive first hand how you've gone shopping incessantly around Town in two years of all the things bought, which do you favor? or prefer? Consider post-operation four ....
GG: Automobiles, Tens, a Sunny afternoon, hostess.

These famed people get to be a little tacky. It's a form of criticism also, part of the poet's world; his attention breaks fragments from these personalities, and the result is funny.

Even reflected from the lives of others, his attitude returns to himself. His article about Lana Turner, A LIVING LEGEND'S INTIMATE MEMOIRS, is as accurate about himself: "Lana Turner today is not the Lana Turner of yesterday. Still beautiful, yes but very much her own woman, in control of her own life." or "Mine has been called a Cinderella story, but to me it's destiny." He is serious about it.

* * *

About forty pieces of John's decoupage, including a cover and frontispiece, stand with the writing. These are details of attention; there were images around the house that demanded control.

Half are photos or clippings torn to a valued isolation. He gets rid of waste space; focuses. One is cropped so just nose to chin of a woman remains, attention forced on the smiling mouth, the row of teeth. He gets rid of all but the major form, its details thus amplified.

The others involve collage. We see evidence of folding and tearing, pieces are overlaid, and tape has been used. In the collaging, nothing is distorted, but things are partly hidden. In the preface to Selected Poems he wrote "Visual order obeys gravity, but genuine shimmering substance cognates more than complacencies of common worth."

The images are mostly from media, some from books, where the images were accompanied by much that distracted; the first premise is to reduce to what holds attention, a small mass of visual fact. The original subject is made visually striking, by being isolated or by being combined with other images.

The frontispiece is composed of John's highschool photo with snaps of Lana Turner, and scraps of writing, over it. The poet sees through, and is speaking from behind, some other person. He absorbs their language, the facts of their lives and, in the decoupage, images of them. The page-size collages and photos are of women, or of gay men. One has prominent headline words: MR. FLOOD'S PARTY Watergaters TRANSVESTITE Bikini. Where legs protruded from pantys, John put a low table so its legs come out of the bikini briefs. By making it over, the collages criticize the world.

The decoupage is evidence of his thinking-writing method. It is a force back of some texts, having served as visual stimulus and support of the writing. It is a way to make visual, exterior, the mind. The writing is mostly for the ears; his decoupage goes to the eye, stops bluntly then stays as residue in the mind, where the words are also a kind of visual residue. The collages provide visual sense of the way he cuts up words and memories and texts, to produce the writing. By the "soundless permeation of madness upon sanity" the mind is broken open and fragments are kept as desirable, as poems, language kept as collage also. It reminds slightly of surrealist-dada techniques of automatic writing or the cut-up of prior texts. But the language remains subjective, sensual, the strong lyrical push and voice through the words.

He quotes the idea that "one perception must directly lead / to another!" That is his practice, pushing the perceptions, whether present as memory or insight or image, closer together. He brings together phrases which would usually be separated by pieces of language supposed to connect them. The language is made present without being asserted in the usual senses. There is no room left for argument. There would seem to be room only for understanding or misunderstanding, for apprehension or ignorance. But his cutting technique dissolves the question of a split between understanding and

misunderstanding; license is granted by implication that each reader cuts farther, as reading inevitably modifies and re-creates. This makes any reader, this reviewer for instance, reluctant to insist in any passage on any one meaning. Meaning, where it does exist, is always beside the point of language and captured intent.

YOURS TO TAKE

There's a certain type of men
  born to suffer as women
the worst kind
who never marry and play around

with their own kind. Murderers
no, although as journeyman, tasks they themselves
have been slain by women.
Somehow, in the loneliness bottleneck they get back

Who can say, what committed
this antagonism. It's the women
who have struck out in their suffering.

Bitter to get caught behind
their attack. Mourning we go moribund
with such offense. Enjoying them

up to a point, but it's men who
maintain release for a degree,
  who can know, it's too soon

  to say.

"It's the women who have struck out in their suffering. Bitter to get caught behind their attack." Does this mean: women have somehow failed in their suffering, it makes the poet bitter to bear their attack; or, women have gone out ahead in suffering, it's too bad to get left behind the force of their attack? My interpretation: women are blamed for destroying some men, for making them suffer as women. But the language permits meanings beyond the ones I suggest. A

piece of language is cherished because occasionally it can mean more than one thing at a time. Often we can't make a literal interpretation of the writing. The language reaches in more than that one direction. On some things it settles more strongly, for longer, but the grasping is primary attribute. The poet may have felt himself to be speaking a thing; we don't experience that thing, we experience the poet speaking it. With the poet through physical and metaphysical and political (metro-physical) concerns, we see each thing he touches toward, and must judge from the language the strength of each attachment or contact.

While cutting into memories, the words and phrases also get severed. He distorts spelling to gain additional meaning, or to gain a sound parallel to particular meaning in the mind. He also cuts words at the line end without hyphen, and uses parts of words left after cutting (for instance SSiS, from ONASSIS), to suggest earlier meanings already in the mind; the cut word seen after tearing it on the page in collaging, or after cutting in his mind. He controls our reading of the words, the speed of our apprehension, and he gains emphasis, by stretching words out on the page, running them together, varying the distribution of capitals (part of the word in caps, part small), and by putting part of a word vertically down the margin then ending it on the usual horizontal line. Many of these changes preserve qualities of speech: speed or hesitation, sloppy and graceful movements, awkwardness or surety, sadness or humor.

Some typing errors were preserved in the text; and when the forms of some works were altered in setting the book, John left them as changed. Some alterations buried, in the body of the language, the feminine endings of lines. He holds that the inspiration of the writing is principal and should survive beyond formal consideration. Errors are a sign of human activity, perhaps inspiring trust and sympathy, instead of misunderstanding or derision.

Collage language uses the plastic fluid quality of language, which the poet solidifies only briefly, line to line. As collage method breaks both verse and prose, it breaks distinctions between the forms. "Prick any literary dichotomy", with the result he ignores or eradicates barriers, he locates through his mind the lesions that exist

in all minds.

John was developing aspects of collage language before this book. Clogged, solid diction is already evident, for example from W W written 1967, "Two splits of casino liberation husband / retrieve one midnight essex." This language the poet has worked so the reader must. He also split words for effect, "under what insult / account with drawn / on sorrow's bank"; he constructed new words and, therefore, new meaning, "the absolute inde- / prudence of youth"; he composed complex images of pieces that don't quite connect but can be made to in the mind, "much in the same manner of industrial complexes / covering the rising cigarettes of patriots." He broke the language to locate some new thing; he found it in the breaking and preserved it in the writing.

* * *

The writing is often difficult. Particularly the newer poems must be taken a line at a time if the reader wants to understand. The lines do not always follow one to the next, but there is a cumulative sense, and this sensibility is grasped if each unit of understanding (line, phrase, piece of phrase, cut word, paragraph, whatever) is taken and placed among the rest, exactly as the poet has given them. In THE WINDOWS, in Ace of Pentacles, John writes of Apollinaire's poem that he sees "each line in his poem as a poem, entire to itself, a sound and an end in itself, without periods. There are no connections. And yet, look how each one of us is hooked."

It all coheres in some fashion in the mind; why not have it cohere, without change, outside the mind too. This often leaves the words raw, difficult as memory is to contain or make sense of. He says "over simplification aligns aspersion"; things placed too simply, injure, by being much less than adequate, by hardly even tending to approach the complex difficulty.

> Composition proves: FALLOw verbs, projective grammatical syntax and an opposition both of cosmic generosity to timidity of an original sort, leave a course, difficult to pilot. This book in its writing is the record of one, stylized and self-conscious, it

behooves to haphazard twinkling bushes on the phosphorence, and sore throats.

The beacon is solid and twinkling, but it requires work to get there.

An hardness prompts literature, unspoken terms of forfeting daily routine, to surrender never in the face from derangement. I know men work for statement, avowal as well -- predictable to hospitalize various qualities, commodities upon the counters of literary mountings. Maybe two men realize society more fully. These terms consistently re-occur in annals of eternal KULTUR. A definite respect out words from patriarchal legacy.

His method produces beautiful verses and amazing prose; at points he comes out of the difficult, almost vague, masses of language, to a clear statement about (say) city government. He leaves the effect of a voice rushing over itself to some conclusion which is reached only in the activity, which we only partially approach. From John's point of view, the difficulty is perhaps a defense.

Reading then rereading the work, you can feel where the language has been folded and torn. Each word holds a small amount of a certain emotion, in its use; when it is set on the paper, or taken up, the feeling is let out. And when the words are torn, or torn from each other, or handled vigorously, a larger volume of the feeling is radiated.

LEW ELLINGHAM WIENERS IN SAN FRANCISCO: THE LOCATIONS

"John Wieners moved in with me with his lover, Dana," Tom Field said. Tom was telling me about his apartment at 509 Buchanan Street in San Francisco in the late 1950s. These were blocks of Victorian housing, many now cleared away, which composed the Western Addition, a large tract west of Van Ness Avenue built after the Civil War. New slums now occupy most of the land. About Wieners and Dana Duerke, Tom continued, "They showed up from

nowhere."

Other young writers and painters and their friends drifted into and out of this world of ex-Black Mountain College students, part of the spinoff that had collected in San Francisco after Charles Olson had closed the college the fall term of 1956. Tom Field, a painter, had come to California, settled and begun to ship out as a merchant seaman to support himself. He came and went from his held space on Buchanan Street. "John Wieners and Dana both moved to a place over on Leavenworth Street and then they split up. Dana moved in with me then. For a long time. We had some beds." When I asked Field about the size of the apartment he answered, "I have always had a place to paint. When Dana moved in he moved into the bedroom that I used as a bedroom and living room and everything. The backroom was always kept as a studio or sort of make-out room. With sliding doors it could be made into a bedroom."

Where cheap housing could be found. Where neighbors tolerated a bohemian lifestyle. Most of all, where a combination of the above worked and the place also had panache, the foodstores and bars and restaurants of a foreign community or ethnic minority perhaps; maybe too fine views and curious streets, with many or no people -- something special. San Francisco has always been a city of neighborhoods. These have tended to merge as the city has moved away from a working-class to a middle-class population, with a freeway network and chain merchandising outlets bonding every part of the town. That Tom Field had lived in the Western Addition (the mostly black Fillmore district was its other name), that John Wieners and Dana Duerke lived on Leavenworth Street near Polk Gulch, that many of the ex-Black Mountain people lived in North Beach with its Iatlian population involved a sense of living in distinctly varying places. Artists, a transient group, might bridge these islands by bus or on foot -- the way poor people travel -- but people who grew up in these districts, who lived ordinary lives in them, seemed always there, their activities in the streets around local shops and hangouts.

Wieners' Polk Gulch is perhaps less changed than any district in San Francisco today from what it was in the 1950s/60s in its mixtures of people. The street served and serves as a corridor of young gays newly arrived hustling with the quick-walking, car-to-sidewalk,

bookstore and cafe atmospheres such congress supports. Again local features have begun to yield to mass commodity/merchandising operations along the street, but this too has had its place historically. Polk Gulch is a place of meetings, an edge to other places -- Downtown and the Tenderloin, Civic Center (government) and the Van Ness Avenue/U.S. 101 expressway. At Polk and Sutter streets, where a Mexican fast-food outlet works now, an outlet for Foster's Cafeterias once functioned, a chain defunct since the 1960s. Foster's was on the ground floor of the Hotel Wentley, the three-story building on the northeast corner. From the outside the only changes are fresh aluminum window sashes for each room and, every few years, new paint, sometimes light beige, sometimes off-white.

This Foster's operated 24 hours daily, a classic fixture of awful foods (steam-table warmed-over macaroni dishes, weak coffee, etc) where the poor-old waited out long hours over a tea-bagged cup for newspapers to be abandoned so they might read something, where junkies with huge sunglasses (shades) relaxed, scored, stared or sat with friends in clouds of smoke that marked their tables like mushrooms, where passers-by hoped to quickly snack and escape, where defectives and burnt-outs wheezed and whistled, blurted out comment, sighed, hooted and moaned. The bathrooms were considered more bazaars for the illicit and unspoken than toilets, though they served many needs. Those asleep on the floor were hurried along from time to time as were table-loungers who had stayed too long without spending money.

Painters more than poets formed the art circle along Polk Street, Rick Barton, the LaVigne brothers (Bob LaVigne made the cover for John Wieners' first edition -- Auerhahn's 1958 -- of The Hotel Wentley Poems). Even so, Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky, random others, sortied to Polk from their center in North Beach. Polk Street's length is a village in its way, from Aquatic Park at the north end where sun and grass and views of the Golden gate anchor an aisle all the way back to the Tenderloin and Civic Center two miles away and snuggle a world one can live in. Cheap hotels have served as a basis for working people's lives in several parts of San Francisco and still do where they survive. There are many fewer of them today, and these not too cheap, most of them owned by an East Indian business/family. Once the story was rather different. Young people

just off the farm or boat situated in such hotels. They occupied the spaces above many if not most of the two- and three-story buildings of every inner-city district. Where hotels didn't crowd, small very inexpensive apartments did. Space was easy to find and not costly, rents in the ranges of fifteen to twenty-five percent of any working person's income. Without these spaces, the bohemia of San Francisco would not have been imaginable. Restaurant fare served a similar clientele. When, in the 1980s, San Francisco has become the nation's costliest metropolitan area to live in, and thus the world's probably, it may be hard to imagine that only a generation ago people came to the City because it was inexpensive and beautiful, in that order for many.

The Wentley Hotel was little different than any other, small rooms filled with very transient and/or lost people, some aging, some derelict, some en route up or downward in America's tensely grinding (and supposedly invisible) class structure. Often patrons came to know one another, left doors ajar; others hid, locked their rooms several times over with special padlocks. Toilets and showers were down the hall. Halls were poorly lit. A runner, worn and dull like the oft-painted walls, joined long lengths of doors along corridors, breaking at stairwells and building corners to run another length, windowless, dim. Managements varied in tolerance for unpaid rents, noise, stealing. The Wentley had a poor record, but no worse than dozens of others in the Polk district, North Beach, Market Street and the Mission, where most of such places were. Hotplates were discouraged usually, but were common. Most people ate out, in places like the Foster's Cafeteria on the Wentley's first floor. Heat was usually provided for -- San Francisco luckily averages a night temperature between 45 and 65 degrees in every season so that no one will outright freeze -- but the very cheapest hotels had no heat. Like the Green valley near Grant Avenue and Green Street in North Beach, where monthly rents for small room ranged from $11 to $18. The San Gottardo, near Ferlinghetti's City Lights Books on Columbus Avenue, with heat, priced perhaps five dollars higher for most rooms, no more. Artists lived in all these places, along with retired, foreign-born, rural native workmen, merchant sailors often at sea, pensioners, ladies and gentlemen of the night, whomever. One went to a bar or other public place to make a telephone call, received messages with the hotel manager sometimes, sent notes by mail. People were out in

the street a lot, left word for each other.

Artists met each other in their personal settings too. Joanne Kyger and Ebbe Borregaard talked to me about Sunday poetry meetings, scheduled the fall through most of next years, 1957-8, at Joe and Caroline Dunn's Polk Gulch apartment on Jackson Street. Opened Joanne, "So where did we have the meetings at? The first one I came to was at Joe Dunn's house. John Wieners was there."

"It was not a walk-up flat or anything," Ebbe Borregaard made clear. "It was just one step up and then -- darkness. And then tiny rooms." He turned to Kyger. "You remember the icebox?"

"I remember a refrigerator with a picture of Rimbaud in it with all the ice. It was really get-down 'grungy --' "

Ebbe picked up with, " 'Dungy' and 'grungy' and I think --"

But Joanne righted things. "There was a serious meeting, in which Nemi Frost and I drank a lot of red wine --"

"Yes," nodded Ebbe.

"-- and there was never anything to drink it out of and Nemi and I --"

"-- jelly jars --"

So Joanne remembered too. "Jelly jars! We drank it out of a saucepan!"

"There were three jelly jars for these--" Ebbe counted in an addition of containers for people present. He scaled the memoty. "There were never that many people really."

"Yes, there were a lot of people," corrected Kyger. "It was sort of like a party atmosphere. I went along with Jerome Mallman and Nemi Frost. I remember one time -- it was a famous evening -- John Wieners introduced me to Michael Rumaker and Tom Field. Tom Field was charming. Michael Rumaker showed me how to make martinis, rhine wine and gin. We had a lot of rhine-wine-and-gin martinis and then we had dinner and then we all went out to North Beach and ended up getting arrested that night."

Ebbe Borregaard broke in. "George Stanley and Jerome

Mallman and I all got arrested."

Kyger: "Went to jail, a finger to the cops!"

Ebbe: "-- who almost ran us down, for Chrissakes!"

Joanne: "So they hauled you and Jerome and George Stanley up and we called Ida Hodes, who bailed you out in time to come to the poetry reading the next day. You guys walked in and were heroes after a night in jail." With this, the rich Kyger laugh.

Ebbe too laughed in a loud burst and Joanne ended with, "I remember Michael Rumaker saying, 'Run! Run! They'll get you too!' We ran all the way home, creeping."

When I asked Tom Field about Joe and Caroline Dunn's place he described it as "this dumpy little apartment. It wasn't cheap or anything really. I always think of them as prototype-punk or something."

"Dark?" I asked.

"Whatever it was. Green makeup on his wife. I don't remember her name. They were from Black Mountain."

Both Polk Gulch and North Beach were awash with whatever it took to get and stay cheaply stoned. The Wieners' circle -- and Polk Gulch -- seemed more likely to favor the dopes available. The North Beach people were more catholic, alcohol playing an equal or larger role. But Russian Hill, which divided the two districts, was not so formidable that hostile encampments or lifestyles focused at its opposite feet. And whatever the high, art was the issue for most of these ex-Black Mountain and Californian youth in their early twenties. Some were younger, a few (the elders) thirty-ish, like Robert Duncan, Jack Spicer, Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti. The stars. The City. What had come together.

Conversations drawn from tapes made in research for a project, "The Spicer Circle in San Francisco, 1956-1965."

LAURA FELDMAN A POEM for RECORD PLAYERS by JOHN WIENERS

In a poem for record players I came in because it said "come in". Excited by he calls at god and says -- god I am in relief to you -- I knew this was going to be good. The spaciousness of a Bay window out my window in exhaust pipes of a thousand cars gunning their motors turning over all over town. Not just cool city but infinite integration.

I'm in with a drink in my hand. The music is pervasive. A fight begins. A man who is drunk and sad with one who isn't and isn't. Puncturing. To keep cool is a distance from discord I don't care about the issue there are so many. If blood could crash my attention. A disinterest forced by boiled down residue of soul but for one lurid scream that punctures -- America you boil over -- permeates.

But I'm not bored exactly I'm used somehow too much of this and so sitting then in the cafe with lucid cafe the difference is is that you know even if you shot a gun thru the newspaper right thru to the hole in his head with blood and every dripping he'd still be there. America you boil over. You make your own bed lie love it or leave it and that written in the fifties from here if language has the power to free.

I was sitting in a cafe thinking I no longer believed in singing them. The possibility of change when nothing in you changes. New York, New England, Vermont green mountains and Massachusetts my city, Boston and the sea say Oregon makes me different?

RUSSELL FITZGERALD FROM A DIARY OF 1957, introduced by a note "On Russell FitzGerald" bv Lew Ellingham, June 1985

(Russell FitzGerald died in 1978 in his mid-40s. His early life was spent in and around Philadelphia, where he studied painting. In 1957 he came to San Francisco, met Jack Spicer and his group of young poets and artists in North Beach, and stayed irregularly with this community for several years. This exposure to art, understood as Orphic and highly

disciplined, remained a central concern of his life. A theme of black/white racial/sexual encounter, drawn from his personal life, provided much of his subject in both painting and writing, to which he was equally committed.

After 1962 he married Dora FitzGerald and together, with her infant twins from another association, they lived as family in New York until 1970 and thereafter in Vancouver, Canada. His work has been collected by friends and published in small magazines.)

September 16 --- The goodness of the earth is only the goodness that good men can make it have. --- human communication is a fragile thing. Human love is a well-intended lie. --- solitude is the place to live a creative life --- dictums of the day.

September 17 --- Turandot for the first time, tonight at 8:00. hunger pains this morning from about 4:00 till 9:00. but the shattering of the eating habit is enough to make the world more vivid --- even my position outside the sacraments became painfully real when I was still half-asleep. --- but in these statements I surely exagerrate.

September 19 --- Turandot was very disappointing. Vulgar sets and messy costumes. Good voices but stilted acting. Puccini's unsuccessful wrestle with Wagner for two tedious acts -- only brightened by the old-trick style (but beautiful) of Nessun Dorma. The final duet (which, I understand, he didn't write!) was almost Wagnerian bel canto, but, too vague. An ugly, dull, spectacle.

Have not seen Jack for days.

Work is going is badly as the worst periods.

Charles is reading like a real bookworm. Charles Williams! more material for that pathetic brand of sincere bullshit.

September 20 --- Conversations with Spicer (a week ago) and readings on Norton's Crane biography have fallen together so that I see that

I no longer need to hope. My sense of relief surprises me because I never thought of hope as a burden. But there is nothing to hope for anymore. Interior growth perhaps, but is this a matter to hope about? It would seem to be wrong to do anything but wait --- why or how should I presume to hope to grow? But the exterior facts are suddenly acceptable. The world is all wrong but that is somehow no longer a personal concern. I'm free because I do not hope. How unexpected! Freedom from choices. All the important choices have been made. I really don't think I understand. Why has this happened? What is this state?

talking to Charles about the possibility of my mother supporting me was awkward and painful but not so impossible as it has seemed. He suggested that the only difficulty would be my possible feeling of inadequacey. I said that I thought that would not happen. I accept my need for help. Giving and recieving are both sacraficial acts and pride is destroyed in both directions. (the Holy Mysteries are not the only ones.) (Gibran is still bearing fruit)

I haven't had any really exciting sex with anyone since leaving Philadelphia. Someone about five feet six inches tall and about twenty years old would be just lovely. Cock size optional (within reason), but it is to be ardently wished that the uncircumsized beauty be graced with big, low slung balls. Slender limbs and a tight ass.

Mary, mother of Jesus, protect us useless males from the spell of our own ornamental beauty. Pray for us in sticky embraces. Pray for us if our singlenesses do or do not ever join. Pray for us at night.

---

rereading the journal --- what disgusting posturings and gasey phraseology. More than a bit silly.

September 21 --- Spicer lones money like a friend. And shows poems like a friend and in fact, I guess, is a friend. How did this ever happen?

September 22 --- a feeling about disaffiliation has produced some

ideas. It seems true that it is better to avoid close affiliation with a sick culture. The fringe is one locations where this can be done. But if guilt is not the only consideration, indeed if we realize that it is attached to everyone of us, even those in deliberate exile, what is actually gained by those who disafiliate and society? The situation seems like that of an unheard chorus in a tragic burlesque. Has the world that men have built become impossible quarters for those who seek truth and beauty and goodness? Is there in fact no place within the social structure for the poetic spirit? Is it true that all of the traditional places are now either nonexistent or infected by pernicious commercialism? Can the "unheard" chorus effect the action of the drama --- to whom will it even act as interpreter?

September 23 This morning as I bent over the wash bowel the smell of soap set off a true involuntary memory experience. The smell seemed to mean something. It faded. I searched with my nose. Suddenly it was the smell of soap and water in the sunlight of my grandmother's porch. Morning glories and pine needles and the smell of potatoes frying in ham fat. Then even more vividly the cry of the locust announcing another hot day. It faded as I sat down at the table and began to think about it. I remembered that I had not written or seen my father's parent's for some time and decided to write a letter. (Mornings are a fine time for letter writing.) And as I began to tell them about the "dream" that prompted me to write I was over-whelmed just as Proust describes being so invaded in the final chapters of REMEMBRANCE. Bits of sensuous experiences from my childhood visits on Lone Pine Farm, Tatta Hill, New Hope, Pa. dissolved the present. Playing dress up as gypsie in a dusty corn crib. Oil lamps. Wasps about the out house. Lilacs. The squeak of a rusty glidder, sound of rosary beads rattling on the choir balconey, the funny crunch of the mat at the church door. The church's smell. It's statues. Black berry picking. Heat and flowers. Tears and a child's loneliness. Peaches and cream and rich chocolate cake. And over it all a blinding of tears and the sweetest happiness I've ever knowm. This last, not a memory, but an experience that so joined itself to these memories that it and they became the same thing. And -- Beckett says -- it was the heart breaking beauty of Paradise lost that

seemed to destroy time.

September 24 * Today I bought Lorca's POET IN NEW YORK and Merton's NO MAN IS AN ISLAND. Nosed around a bit in both. Merton is terrifying. What is one to do if one believes all these things untill the slow turning of a boy's head or the inflaming grace of his elbow blasts even the world out of mind? (Read Seeds of Contemplation very twistedly in 1950) I think that it is not so much those times of passionate illusion that I would wish to keep, but rather the right to hope that sometime it will happen correctly and all it's results will be good.

The picture deepens. ARK II MOBY I contains more thought provoking things and pictures which I find ugly. (done with earth and water -- really!) What the hell is happening elsewhere? besides Black Mountain and N. Beach? What are the affiliates doing? How important is "the movement" and if it is important how do I avoid merely riding its coat tails?

September 26 * Wonderfully entertaining and staggeringly long letter from "J.R." Russell Snyder. Depressing news about Carol's and Ellen's speculations on the morality of my reception on money from Charles, did not; could not, dampen the great warmth which both Russ's words and tone communicated. I was rather startled by what he had to say about the Renaissance. He doesn't like the language, the images, or the personalities but sends loud cheers of approval and deep sympathy. He says New York, Chicago, Boston, etc. are "dehumanized" and incapable of producing a group of people with a community of interests and concern for art. "In short, don't come back!"

Reading Lorca's Poet in New York and Merton's NO MAN --- my, my, I repeating my self -- how ingrown! ---- concert of Milhaud Quintets and Brahms Sextet at the Museum last night was the first live musical experience (satisfactory) in months. Chris Ibanez at Jazz Workshop, later, was alright too. Chats with Booth Goodman -- very relaxing but rather arrid.

Analysis and Digestion of new ideas and attitudes. Some silence and then, it is to be hoped, creative production. STATIONS as

newsphotos.

September 27 * the world moves, on its metaled ways --- "KEROUAC writes non-syntactically." (George Stanley) The first rain in almost four months. Strange grey sky and the pleasing cozy sound of rain outside. "Jack is in L.A." With his sick mother and the phantom of Lorca too I suppose. Silence only. Nothing stirring in my heart. Strange silence without despair. Silence as cozy as the room with the rain outside. An acceptable, warm, meaningless, hopeless, undespairing silence. On the fringe --- of the world.

RAYMOND FOYE A CONVERSATION WITH JOHN WIENERS

Our interview took place over the Christmas holiday, 1984. Mr Wieners' apartment on Joy Street in Boston was gaily decorated for the season, with stryofoam reindeer, Santa Clauses, twinkling candles, elves made from red and green felt, and a plastic nativity scene perched atop the portable T.V. set in a corner of the bedroom. This is the same suite of rooms the poet has occupied for twelve years, and he tells visitors that he derives great pleasure from this corner of historic Beacon Hill. His three rooms are sparsely furnished. There is a front sitting room, a back bedroom where he sleeps and writes, and a guest bedroom. There are several bookcases but they are all empty. Old movie magazines and 1950s detective pulps collect on his bedside table, next to a copy of Beyond Beauty by Arlene Dahl. On the coffeetable in the front room Mr Wieners has placed a black folio containing all of his works from the past two years, his first poems since his formal renunciation of poetry following the publication of Behind the State Capitol (1975).

A delicate porcelain Chinese bowl also sits on the table, filled to the brim with aspirin tablets, "for the guests," he explains. But Mr Wieners is a genial host, and offers the pick of a bountiful cheese and fruit basket his sister Marion has sent for the holidays. Throughout the interview he smoked incessantly, but spoke in a relaxed manner. He occasionally

rose to pace the room, or stood gazing out the window at the snowfall that had begun to dust the gold dome of the state capitol building.

At one point the phone rang, and it was his good friend Charles Shively, extending a dinner invitation in Cambridge that evening, which he accepted for the both of us. Shively remains one of the few friends Wieners stays in touch with, and he has been a valued secretary, editor and publisher since the early seventies.

Mr Wieners was eager for news of New York, and hoped to make his yearly visit over New Years-time. He asked about the repairs being made on St Mark's Church, and inquired about a recent Cy Twombly exhibition. As we settled down to this interview, he turned on the radio, fiddled briefly with the dial, and found Billie Holiday singing "The Man I Love." The transcript captures some of the quixotic nature of his conversation, some of his wry and pithy delivery, but remains only a scanty residuum of any encounter with this rare poet, where the best is always left unsaid.

RAYMOND FOYE: What made up your mind to attend Black Mountain College?

JOHN WIENERS: They sent me train fare.

RF: Recently I was reading some of your juvenilia, poems written as a student at Black Mountain.

WIENERS: Those were not supposed to be published.

RF: I was surprised to find you writing in a very long line -- Whitmanesque. Because your first book, The Hotel Wentley Poems, is exceedingly spare. What precipitated that shift?

WIENERS: I was starving, so I wrote lean poems.

RF: Were you living at the Hotel Wentley?

WIENERS: For a summer. And hanging out in Bob's room. (LaVigne -- RF.)

RF: Was he away?

WIENERS: No, he was there.

RF: It seems to have been a productive period.

WIENERS: Not really, I was reading, mostly, and watching Bob paint. It's hard to remember the follies of one's youth.

RF: Do you ever miss San Francisco?

WIENERS: Not a day goes by that I don't think of it.

RF: I noticed some tiny maps on your bedroom wall, of San Francisco, of Buffalo....

WIENERS: It's funny how these cities die when we leave them.

RF: Who are the early influences on your poetry?

WIENERS: Edna St Vincent Millay was the first. Later it was Charles Olson.

RF: And at the time of the Wentley poems?

WIENERS: Olson, until 1973.

RF: And who since then?

WIENERS: The Virgin Mary.

RF: There aren't many books here, but I notice you're reading Melville.

WIENERS: He must have been wonderful company in those wooden

frame houses!

RF: I also saw the memoirs of Blaze Starr....

WIENERS: ...from which I'm borrowing heavily for my own autobiography.

RF: In assembling your Collected Poems, you've been reluctant to reprint much of your early work.

WIENERS: They're old faces I don't care to see again.

RF: This past weekend I was reading your correspondence with Robert Duncan from the 'fifties. He was a decisive figure for you.

WIENERS: And a rather effeminate man, don't you think?

RF: In a stylish way.

WIENERS: Very.

RF: And Olson?

WIENERS: A lummox!

RF: You've always spoken to me quite highly of Robert Creeley's work.

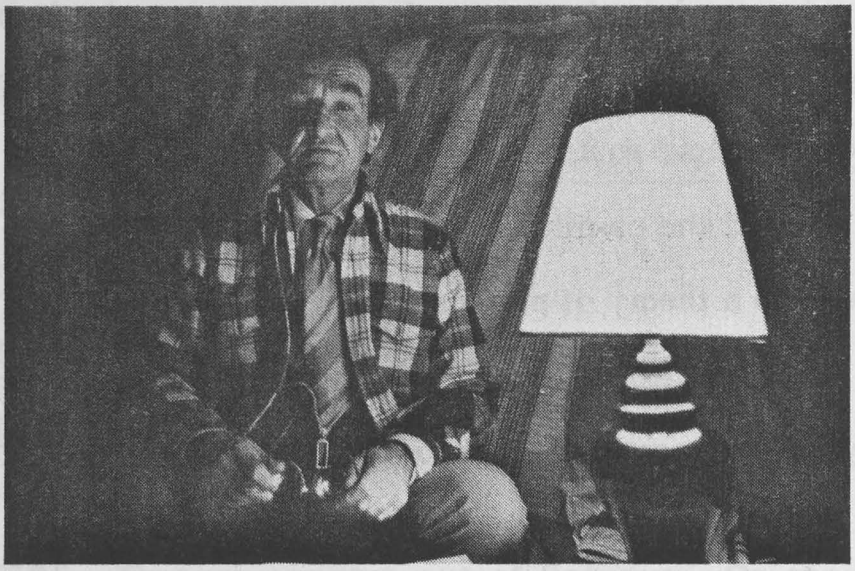
WIENERS: Oh yes, I'm mad about obtuseness!

RF: I once saw a photograph of you, walking in San Marco in Venice, between Olson and Ezra Pound. Rather exalted company.

WIENERS: To say the least.

RF: What was Pound like?

WIENERS: Oh, he was a mama's boy.



John Wieners at home, Boston, December 1984.

Photos by Raymond Foye

RF: You once recommended to me translation, as a valuable exercise for a poet.

WIENERS: In teaching contrapunctus.

RF: Can we talk about writing poetry?

WIENERS: I'm just the co-pilot.

RF: Do you have a theory of poetics?

WIENERS: I try to write the most embarrassing thing I can think of.

RF: Have you ever been bored by your great technical facility?

WIENERS: Yes.

RF: Have you a preferred working method?

WIENERS: Confusion, usually.

RF: Until the age of thirty-five, you were quite prolific as a poet, but as time went on, you wrote less and less.

WIENERS: When I first wrote poetry it was out of a need for personal expression. But as one works it's inevitable that one becomes more self-conscious, and it's so easy to slip into self-indulgence. And then the spontaneity begins to depart.

RF: In that case it's better just to stop?

WIENERS: Yes.

RF: It seems to me a major shift took place in your work, circa 1972. You abandoned the terse, lyric poems for a more hallucinative prose style -- more extroverted, and decidedly political.

WIENERS: I felt I'd exhausted my subjects at that point.

RF: When I showed you what I'd assembled for the forthcoming Black Sparrow book you were somewhat taken aback by the size of it.

WIENERS: My next book is going to consist of one word: Doris.

RF: May we consult the texts? Selected Poems, 1972. A poem called "Jive."

WIENERS: That's rather promiscuous.

RF: Do you remember writing each of these?

WIENERS: Oh yes.

RF: "Monday Sunrise."

WIENERS: That was written out of Bellevue. On the eighth floor. You get a marvellous view of Manhattan and the East River. Don't be afraid if you ever get sent there, it's beautiful inside.

RF: You've written several poems to painters.

WIENERS: I found them better company.

RF: Than your fellow poets?

WIENERS: Yes, they were always too vampyric.

RF: This one is to Delaunay ("The Windows").

WIENERS: It was requested by Mr Schuyler who then worked for Art News. The idea was to publish poems derived from paintings. At the Farnsworth Collection in the Lamont Library at Harvard I used to look at the art books. And I came across this painting, which had been given to a poet. And I thought this might tie in. I stayed up for three days, trying to equate each color or gesture with a sound. It was an attempt at approximation, without reference to thought. So the poem was rejected.

RF: It was a little tenuous for Art News?

WIENERS: I was not capable of coherence then.

RF: Yesterday we were talking of Lacan and you seemed to take a dim view.

WIENERS: It's disappointing.

RF: What is?

WIENERS: To render psychology in terms of rationality is an outrage.

RF: Do you ever tire of the literary life?

WIENERS: It never fags me.

RF: You live very much alone, here in Boston. Are you disillusioned?

WIENERS: Oh, no. It's not possible to be disillusioned. Not when one lives in the Holy Spirit.

RF: Your new poems are....

WIENERS: ...scarce.

RF: Well, they're that too. I think we've typed up about thirty pages.

WIENERS: Thirty pages from a fifty-year-old in 1984 is quite a lot, I think. But I am not ready to write my last book yet. I will write it in my old age.

RF: And until then?

WIENERS: I am living out the logical conclusion of my books.

RF: Is there a poem you've yet to write?

WIENERS: I want to write a poem about an old person dying of

loneliness. I want to write a poem about an old person, alone in a room, dying of hunger and loneliness. No one has ever written a poem about an old person dying in the cold, of hunger and loneliness. Except of course Ava Gardner, who is always our master.

ROBERT GLÜCK LEARNING TO WRITE/WIENERS

A hospital housekeeper cleaning an
emergency room lifted a sheet
off the body of a car wreck victim
and discovered her husband

Here the psyche is fending off
an incursion by an "other"
The skepticism and questioning are both
consciousness and its projection

If you're masturbating twice in a row
and imagination lets you down
you need to pull out all the stops
think about watersports, I do!

blank wall that words (both
exterior and interior) bounce
against -- by taking himself apart
he places his judgement in the world.

Libido's a corny circus clown
makes you laugh but really cry
schizophrenia's a painful language, but ours --
loveitorleaveit! Good counsel:

There's no hope so fond or wish so great that I cannot accomplish for you. I guarantee success where all others fail. People have come for miles with their problems and succeeded to solve them with my help. I have faith in what I do. I have never-failing advice on all

affairs of life such as love, courtship, marriage, divorce, business speculations, and transactions. I never fail to unite the separated, cause speedy, happy marriages, overcome enemies, rivals, lover's quarrels, and stumbling blocks and bad luck of all kinds. Restore lost nature. God bless you until I see you.

Look up! Astrology's one approach
to charting out the self
but the sky's too small -- still there you are,
stars in eternity

son Lane is not, however, modeled
after a movie star. He is very much
like the man I was married to.
He is an actor in the sense

that all men are actors. They act
like they love you. No I didn't mean
to say that. I don't want to sound
bitter because I'm not bitter at all.

I tenderly lift you in my arms
and carry you up the temple steps
and toss you over the volcano's rim
plop! see you in China

Lane felt first pang of panic
when pulled emergency cord,
figure with mouth open --
need -- aggression --

Libido's a dopey circus clown
makes you laugh but wish it'd cease,
bestiality necrophilia sadism --
Don't (I) beat a dead horse

Two test-tube embryos orphaned by
millionaire American parents
await a life-or-death decision
in deep-freeze in Australia.

JOHN GRANGER THESIS, PARENTHESIS.

The Heisenberg uncertainty relation forbids accurate (THE IMPERATRICE who sits supreme above all human ecstasy.) measurement of two "conjugate variables," such as the momentum (Difficult image, hazy to the mind, out of focus / the description in-) and position of an elementary particle. The more you know momen- (adequate to the infinity inherent in her action /of sitting on a throne) tum, the less you know position, or the greater its uncertainty. Thus (. . . Or with the objects of eternity about her and on play / for our) John Wieners on the Imperatrice (his title) uncertainty (my inference): (eyes worn out with love. **44342** The higher one goes up the angelic) description is inadequate to the infinity inherent in action. Push (ladder / remains the minute bits and ends of our life. / As the dark) precision to its limit, and inversely, you push uncertainty as far. At (spreads out its blot against the sky, or day becomes night, the las-) the point of maximum precision, maximum uncertainty suspends (situde and apathy increase / until at last tnere is left only the moon) some familiar physical laws. Herein lies the investiture of poetry - at (in the devil's eye, and key / his crotch to divinity. Divulge the secret) the limit of measurement, under the government of the uncertainty (whereby we may become / stars and glow in the night **58839** Lizard) relation, reality plays. It plays croquet with hedgehogs, flamingoes (under the stone, / bees buzz around us through the two trees full of) and cards, under the government of the Red Queen; off with every- (canaries and / in the burnt grass / yellow poppies. **73338** Without) one's normalizing heads. For a very short time, anything goes. (image / we are bereft **89923** It is enough: a small song in the willows) Anything can be made out of energy 'stolen,' if it's replaced before it's (/ without words amid the shadows of the night. Broken birch by the) missed. It takes time to measure energy (time and energy are conjug- (river / where the irises are, rows of light / across the meadow, as) ate variables) so there is time for theft and replacement before time (stars that shine and break on dawn. Dread night is gone, / you see) for detection is up. The shorter the period of theft, the greater the (suspended in a bar against the blackness / the mighty lord, who) energy available, unto infinity. In mathematics, the problem is infin- (makes his way / Love in his eyes as a bride might say / To put away) ities. Irrational companions of precision, they ruin the mathematical

(all fear. **76899** A bride to the burden / that no god imposes but)
argument, and so mathematicians "renormalize" equations that pro-
(knows we have the means / to sustain its force unto the end of our)
duce them. In poetry, the problem is God. Think of Jack Spicer's
(days. For that is what we are made for; for that we are created.)
Magazine Verse, or "The Day Five Thousand Fish Died Along the
(Until the dark hours are done. / And we rise again in the dawn. /)
Charles River" -- tall as an ogre, God walks among the rocks. God
(Infinite particles of the divine sun, now / worshipped in the pitches)
ruins poetry. Imageless, silent truth has an ogre's appetite for image,

sound and narrative, and vice versa.

John Wieners' conjugate variables are a very old pair, absence
(of the night. **85534** And with great fear I inhabit the middle of the)
and presence. They divide The Iliad, Die Zauberflote, and "Who's
(night **90088** The night is a foreign place / without sound or shadow)
Sorry Now?," by Connie Francis (listen for it in Wieners' Nerves).
(**81099** It is enough: a small song in the willows / without words amid)
When maximally accurate, (our own) presence engenders an infinite
(the shadows of the night. / Broken birch by the river where the irises)
form of absence, Wieners' "dread night." Inversely, absence at abso-
(are, rows of light /across the meadow, as stars that shine /and break)
lute accuracy engenders an infinite form of presence, God. "Absence
(on dawn. Dread night is gone **67764** Farewell in the cool night, /with)
at absolute accuracy" is just an odd way of pointing at language --
(stars glistening in front of our eyes. The mind is as blank / as a bone)
many pages of language-theorist Jacques Lacan suggest that a word is
(on the beach / when the tide's run out. **99807** Tempt-ation is lust for)
simply the name of something missing. God is a production of langu-
(the unknown. / I see the unknown words written in my brain / before)
age. He is the first fiction (from the Latin figura), figure of the first
(they are set down on paper. / To ride endlessly on a train like this /)
narrative, in which origin and telos are reversed: first language, then
(without stopping)
God.

Wieners' writing is bound by alternate variables (absence-
(would be pure paradise. / My illuminations of paregoric. / The white)

presence), and torn between alternate infinities, night and God. God's
(swans breathe a tempest of waves. **07678** Do not think of the future;)
presence is proportionate to the accuracy accorded the opposite
(there is none. **92922** There is a roaring in the night as guns going off)
variable, absence (thus language). No surprise that the best descrip-
(/ or cannon. It roars like the sea / and what is become of us / who)
tions of God are in Wieners and Spicer, for according to Wieners (and
(are adrift on this heathen ocean **00887** That we are given enough,)
Spicer), the center of being is absence, not presence. Being is the
(too much as a distraction to penetrate the essential core of our)
center of a labyrinth, which is to say the point of least resolution. At
(being. And what is that but a hollow place? No radiant outpouring /)
leas resolution, being requires greater resolution of its conjugate var-
(as stars of light. **78141** The music loses itself in a labyrinth of)
iable, language. What X is and what X does, definition and descrip-
(deception. / And description is a deceit. / an easy trap to fall into.)
tion, are resolved at one another's expense. To resolve being, de-
(**88768** The mansion deceives itself. / The hands scrawl a secret)
scription becomes labyrinthine, unto infinity (think of Proust).
(message. There is mystery in the brain / and magic will undo it. /)
Description deceives to divest itself of resolution. Writing is de-
(The mysterious fibre of all things. / their tough glow in the dark /)
scription thus divested, deceiving by describing being -- isn't that the
(like garden branches afire at sunset. / With a piece of nylon stocking)
no/yes of writing, half-zero and half-plenitude? So this empty,
(thrown in their midst for good measure / that does not burn but)
contarious mansion (Being) adopts a strategy of willed deceit. That is
(melts / down as we do in our baths, to fool away the night **67880**)
the hand that Wieners plays, wherein we see both his method, (rough-
(/Divulge the secret whereby we may become stars and glow in the)
ly, that magic is an operation of language) and his objective -- to fool
(night **89009** Destiny lies behind our forces / and what lives in the)
away the night.
(soul / dies not)

Therefore writing. Words from poems menace the night. They
(Words from our poems / Menace the night **00032** I am engaged in)
describe, deceive, divest themselves unto transparency. Wieners is
(taking away / from God his sounds. **22314** Move on. Moonlight **88933**)

engaged in removing from God his sound. To remove God's sound is (On our right the fairies / giggle in their lacquered voices & blow) not to silence God (silent in Wieners anyway), but to appropriate (smoke in your eyes let them / it's a nigger's world / and we retain) God's "soft syllables" for another use. God can't menace the night (strength. The gifts do not desert us, / fountains do not dry / up) directly -- they are opposite variables, like being and language. (there are rivers running, / there are mountains / swelling for spring) But poets can. They only require the variable (absence) conjugate to (to cascade **77112** Ocean of space, where we will lie / Until our dust) the variable (presence) which at maximum uncertainty is manifest as (mingles with the fathom / less abyss / Of time; all air is ours to fly /) God. Absence, in a corresponding state of utmost accuracy, is mani- (Amid the rose petals of some forgotten /)
fest in language, and so by extension, in narrative.

The very old battle between narrative and God is suspended (hand. That flowers in the night like moon **00392** To ride in your) when reality plays. It turns out that language and God are effective (heart instead of heaven. This is the card that reads as seven. It) allies against silent, unholy night (Spicer said they frequent the same (turns the night to infinite noon. Changes the course of the unearthly) night-clubs). Herein lies a mystery -- poets, who are foci of presence, (moon. **09987** And I think again of the question that dwells / in our) reach into a veritable sack of anti-matter, into language, for words (minds about the plan / behind man, his place in the universe and the) which are foci of absence (another explanation of Spicer's last words: (universe, its place in man. / And I am left as at eight yrs. old with) my vocabulary did this to me.) That is why art feels so strange, like (the wonder of what makes it all, the infinity between each light /) someone else's clothes, or messages from outer space. Writing is a (and the eternity of one. / And I am dumb with)
kind of theft.

Poets and physicists are after the same thing, which physicists (the question. **93568** For I have seen love / and his face is choice) call (why don't poets?) the Theory of Everything. One substance, one (Heart of Hearts, / a flesh of pure fire, fusing from the center where) force, one event. It began as unity at unifying temperature (very hot),

(all Motion are one. **86657** In their ears ring the hymns of the holy)
until cooling and division. All motion is one in love, which is pure
(night / And music the sound of the lotus / unwrapping. / We have)
fire. Wieners is a spiritual futurist, an apocalyptist like Blake, wait-
(come through the desert to this cool place / where the lotus grow)
ing out the dark hours (seek out his "Address of the Watchman to the
(**89978** The eyes become onyx and pearl. / The night falls at noon.)
Night"). Yet the mind recoils before pure fire and unity, eliciting
(Too soon leaves break from their branches. They whistle in your)
Wieners' fine advice: "Start less close to the source of desire." Telos
(ears. / The spirit is near, and the mind / grasps upward to the full)
first, then source; cosmologists say that the origin is at the end. The
(sun / wheeling in the heavens. At one with the cosmos, you are a)
order of thoughts is: nothing, beauty; night, fire; being, language.
(star shining / In the blue of the day-time sky-light. **88909** As if there)
Even Wieners' work is before the boundary of division, in description,
(were no meaning to it at all, but death or the arrival of a friend in)
and language -- in image. Without image, we are truly bereft, for
(the guise of an angel **77900** The hollow eyes of shock remain /)
there is only left imageless night without words, which are foci of
(Electric sockets burnt out in the / skull. / The beauty of men never)
absence; without stars, without cars (the beauty of men never
(disappears / But drives a blue car through the / stars.
disappears.)

FANNY HOWE MARTYR TO NERVE

Boston: "first bank of hopes, first envisioned paradise:" where John grew up and me too, not many years apart, and where we still live, and never meet. Nerves is his book I carry around. It falls into those intersections where physical meeting is unnecessary because everything has happened there already. We know the same Boston, came with our youths out of it: the old ratty city of Scollay Square and seedy bars, late nights in "the submarine light" of Hayes Bickford, sailors on downtown Washington Street, the El racing through Roxbury to Park Street and from Park Street onto the bridge over the muddy Charles. That Boston of total segregation, of boarding houses instead of townhouses, of Bunny Lang and the Poets Theater, of Latinate

Catholics and Cantabrigians, of post-War dread, of New York worship and South Station's dereliction, tulips and prostitutes, flush priests and nuns still in habits, of drunken Harvard students slumming blind in blizzards, and swanboats and scholars. This has never been a city of artists or poets, being harder on its own people than it is on anyone else. Especially hard on those who are in any sense marginal. In Boston you have to prove yourself somewhere else. You have to pass outside before you can pass inside, because it offers membership to the ultimate class club of self-contempt. How John or any one of us has stayed on, or why, is only answerable in terms of fear, which is the story in Nerves. Published in 1970, composed of poems written in the late sixties, and many of them thinking back into the fifties, with references to adolescence, whose truth grows more luminous each year we leave it behind, the work is most fearless when its subject is most certainly fear. A great shadow covers these poems: the gloom of the Atheneum library, the State house, the gray winter months, the brick and cobblestone of the Hill, the Charles Street jail and Holy Cross Cathedral situated in the shadows of the El. If beauty lay at the intersection between memory and imagination; if memory then was imagination and imagination was memory; if all lyric was true love and loneliness could be spun into heat; even then this poetry would be taking risks which most people do everything to avoid: the risks of self-exposure, sentimentality, beggary. On his knees, these confessions are not the Lowell variety, but a sort far more comfortable with the posture of prayer. And the risks are taken with victory because the human subject is below guilt, where fear and despair churn around together. He really describes what it's like down here: "for the season of migration between earth and heaven." In Nerves poetry provides the Way to the pure question: ubi est amor.

RALPH ISHAM HOTEL WRITING IN THE U.S.A.

"These hotel children," exclaims Rose Sellars, the heroine of Edith Wharton's novel The Children (1928), "They treat concierges like the devil, and God as a concierge. They've less moral sense than the average Andaman Islander."* Is hotel writing, like Wharton's and Wieners', generically American? The great deceits of Little Dorrit -- and then the whole of Proust's second volume -- even Hotel the novel

was written by a Canadian: I can think of many hotel texts from other countries. Nevertheless it seems a tradition particularly American The Hotel Wentley Poems falls into, like a piece of mail down a glass chute. I don't want to come over all F.-R. Leavis on this topic, but there are the following antecedents to consider. Maybe the vacuity, maybe the restlessness or expanse of U. S. life have created this fabric, a veil from behind which the shadows of character appear and disappear and reappear and what have you. It's at once the selling point, and the estrangement factor, in hotel life -- how little it seems like "home." The pioneer, pushing Westward across the frontier of the last century, must have felt similarly disenfranchised, far from the domestic settings he or she had left. "The Blue Hotel" of Stephen Crane conflates these spiritual states, the philoprogenitor of all work of this nature.

It's easy to see why the Hotel seems an attractive/usable mise-en-scene in the first place. When The Love Boat is described as a "floating hotel" you pick up the idea at once: cram into one space X number of characters and follow their complications for one hour (or one thousand pages, what have you). The German novelist Vicki Baum wrote Grand Hotel and the MGM movie version was the first "all-star" picture ever made. Contrariwise look at a piece like Stephen King's The Shining, set in a deserted hotel; its ominous, brooding nature takes its tone from the reverse of this conceit. It's all in the characters who aren't there, so it's Satanic. (If you've read The White Hotel of D.M. Thomas, you've seen the same mechanism used to explore the horrors of Nazism.) As a further refinement, the writer doesn't need representational "characters" at all, as Wieners shows: instead of guests, the Hotel Wentley is filled with lyric moods, arranged with an eye to variety the way The Love Boat's passengers are staggered to please Baby, Grandma, Mom and Dad, Toy Boy and Aunt Harriet.

This principle (general interest) applies, I think, whether or not the hotel in question is nominally "de luxe." Certainly the appeal of luxury is the point of this mode: on a vast scale expenditure and variety are always interesting and sometimes quite expressive. I should point out that, in the well-regulated work of art, the hotel is the soul, and that its different guests when put together form one

well-rounded person. Like O.W. Holmes, "Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul!" Or: "In my Father's house are many rooms." Gosh was this popular in the American drama of the 30s! -- when everything had an allegorical twist to it. Idiot's Delight, The Iceman Cometh, Philip Barry's Hotel Universe are identical plays. People who live in hotels are marginals anyhow (Faulkner, Sanctuary, T. Williams, Vieux Carre, Bataille, The Blue of Noon, Norse's Beat Hotel) -- it's no wonder they're so refracted they don't convey a human personality until taken en masse. Had Woolf been an American The Waves would have been laid in a hotel. Think of the way Longfellow "americanizes" Chaucer: the Tales of a Wayside Inn aren't told by pilgrims, that would be beside the point, but by overnight guests. Among them is this: "Listen, my children, and you shall hear/ of the midnight ride of Paul Revere./ Hardly a man is now alive/ Who remembers that famous day and year --"

That this shell these rooms shall remain while my body has gone out of it is irksome, produces nightmares. Motel culture is only the hotel idea brought forth horizontally -- in Hitchcock's Psycho Norman Bates obsessively cleans each room after each murder, while a row of stuffed birds gazes down quizzically at his back. Humbert Humbert and Lolita Haze flee from motel to motel to escape the consequences of an erotic transgression, and every room looks the same as the last but it's prettier with more neon and shinier saran wrap on the toilet seat. Whereas when my soul leaves my body dissolution begins, like the Case of M. Waldemar of Poe.

Cornell Woolrich's Hotel Room stresses, by its plan of action, the transience of human aspiration and the omnipresence of defeat. Woolrich, who lived a long life in hotel suites shared with his mother, knows them well, the loneliness, the ugly wallpaper, the pretense and the horror. The twelve chapters of Hotel Room share the same title, a date, the year moved forward in time each time, and each tells a sick story about a current resident. "In this room my late husband went insane." "I was only trying to cheat death." Hotel Room and The Hotel Wentley Poems were published the same year, 1958. (So was the first American edition of Lolita.) Ten years later when Woolrich died, the result of gangrene caught in a New York welfare hotel, four people showed up at his funeral. "Now the season of the

furnished room." He left a million dollars to Columbia University. "Death/ death on every/ wall, guillotined/ and streaming in/ flames."

*Postscript on the young.

It's odd how many children appear in this work. Perhaps they're the most marginal of all segments of society, so hotels are where they belong. Henry James' "The Pupil" dies in one, Kay Thompson's Eloise runs one, you know about Lolita and the little boy with the trike in The Shining. And then there was the worst book ever written, John Irving's Hotel New Hampshire. Seymour Glass walks into the Miami surf after a close encounter with a child in a hotel elevator. James Purdy's Malcolm. The "Cloud Hotel" in Capote's Other Voices, Other Rooms. They're living in a fools' paradise. Keep them young, let them pass unscathed, "Leave him not/ to the moths/ .../ Let blond hair burn/ on the back of his/ neck, let no ache/ screw his face/ up in pain, his soul/ is so hooked." "first prints on a cloudy windowpane."

CAROLYN KEMP FEBRUARY 76 DEGREES

The translucent bag, once containing fruit, disappeared
from view. Relieved of mass and shape, it rustled away,
hurling itself across the crewcut grass, over the chest
of a dozer, then toward a pair of checkered men where
it paused, crinkling light into their eyes.

Bodies exposed in rows, toes at attention, display most
efficient position, lotion and reflection to enhance
pigmentation. Witness the productivity of the barely-
clad warming to the color of privilege, that special
texture.

A kite bearing skull and crossbones struggles upward,
tail aligned with Diablo's peak on the eastern horizon.
Triumphant, it mocks that puppet ruler of the canyon,
no less a devil for presiding mutely. Palm trees reminisce,
swaying to embrace the death kite.

Twin black dobermen pad silent on the path, nose the bushes, shoulders hunched like the heat. Spared, I inhale the clarity of cherry blossoms -- first in the nation. Today's floating tone: notable in a weatherless existence.

Air blankets me, lush scents play my glands, thoughts turn to lust and money. A fantasy of shallow passion at night, unlimited credit at noon. I imagine a chaos of hair sprawling my abdomen, thighs, hair everywhere pubic and alive.

The bag that left abruptly at noon tumbled against me under late rays. Brown from the sun, shrunken, the bag released its souvenirs -- chrysalis, molting. Crisp bodies complete their arc on the lawn, sun dialed home. A last breeze lifts the bag up against the kite line. I strain for the skull, now obscured by the level intensity of the sun.

MAURICE KENNY JOHN'S BOA

parting feathers
sequined and varied
doubled and tripled
rainbow colors
words spill in silver
river rapids
pulling notes
sharps and flats
hotel room light bulbs
splash on and off
on darkened streets
revealing teachers
hidden in pinions
tossing it to the winds
over a pointed shoulder
framing a smile
sweet, perhaps, but sly
offering a map

cities terrain
discovered pin-points of schools
corners of celluloid
tacked to walls
remembrance of Garbo
separating
image by image
deciphering
count noses
snubbed-off at the tie
you learn Olson
finally
or for the first time
translated into tongues
deceptive feathers
(ostrich)
fluffy in breeze
draped in moonshine
electrically staged
re-wound it plays and plays
re-wound it plays and plays

words spilling in silver

KEVIN KILLIAN NOTES ON THIS ISSUE

STEVE ABBOTT. Poet, novelist, the publisher/editor of Soup and a contributing editor of Poetry Flash. His interview with Brad Gooch appeared in the last issue of Mirage.

M. L. ADAMS. "Lynette #1." is the opening of a much longer work we'd like to print in toto in the next issue, and it's MLA's take on John Wieners' work "sideways" she says.

MICHAEL AMNASAN. The author of I Can't Distinguish Opposites (Hoddypoll Press, 1983) and the co-editor, with Gail Sher, of a forthcoming writing journal of writing called Otto-Tole.

DODIE BELLAMY. Writer (The Debbies I Have Known), graphic artist (e.g., the logo and cover of this magazine) and coordinator of the Reading Series at Small Press Traffic (S.F.). In the next issue of Mirage she'll edit a feature based on her series of "Experimental Women Writers."

BRUCE BOONE. Who's written My Walk with Bob, Century of Clouds -- Carmen, a sex novel, will appear soon.

WILLIAM CORBETT. His Collected Poems are now available from the National Poetry Foundation (University of Maine, Orono, Maine 04469).

ROBERT CREELEY. Creeley's statement was intended as a "blurb" for the Black Sparrow edition of Wieners' Selected Poems. But Black Sparrow doesn't use blurbs.

SAM D'ALLESANDRO. Writer, performance artist and poet (author of Slippery Sins, Ice Press).

ALAN DAVIES. Lives, works and writes in New York City. His article here, "An Hardness Prompts Literature," originally appeared in the Newsletter of the St. Marks' Poetry Project ten years ago (in review of Behind the State Capitol). Davies is the author of Split Thighs, Active 24 Hours and other books (Name is new from This Press.) "I learned about John Wieners from Robert Creeley, and learned with what permission it is necessary to write from John. A combination of diligence and humor, a combination of the extremely private and the extremely public, and of necessity -- it is these things, among others, in their relation to writing, that I learned about from John." (1985)

LEWIS ELLINGHAM. The Spicer Circle in San Francisco, 1955-1965 is massive and has occupied much of LE's time during the past four years, but he is also an accomplished poet and fiction writer.

LAURA FELDMAN. Works for the Sierra Club in San Francisco and knows well the poetry and cafe Society of which she speaks.

RUSSELL FITZGERALD. I thought it would interesting to print from RFG's diary on this occasion, to give a sense of what it might have been like to have been young, gay, an artist, a drifter, an aspiring mystic, in the cafe/teria-bohemia of SF in the late 50s. My thanks go to Dora FitzGerald for her kind permission to do so, and to Lew Ellingham for setting up the scene & for showing me this diary in the 1st place. One of these days some enterprising publisher will put together a book of RFG's uncollected fiction; it's really unique in its obsessives, hot and cold at the same time -- as if Denton Welch had written James Baldwin's Another Country. Until then: no deluge! (FitzGerald's reference to "STATIONS" is to a series of pictures he was working on at this time, on the Stations of the Cross.)

RAYMOND FOYE. The editor of the forthcoming/new Selected Poems: 1956-84 of John Wieners (Black Sparrow). My debts to RF are manifold -- "multifoliate" is even better. He procured all the poems and photos of JW you'll find herein; steered me to the right people, and away from the wrong; gave freely of his services as adviser, broker, confidant, advocate, etc. I wish I could thank him enough.

ROBERT GLÜCK. Poet and writer of fiction: a new book of each is promised soon: Reader from Lapis Press and Jack the Modernist from Seahorse.

JOHN GRANGER. Author of The Idea of the Alien, the ground-breaking thesis on Spicer prepared at Simon Fraser Univ. (Vancouver) under Robin Blaser's direction. Now at UCSD.

FANNY HOWE. Novelist (In the Middle of Nowhere and Holy Smoke) and author of many other books incl. Alsace-Lorraine.

RALPH ISHAM. Author of The Hours Like Diamonds (1952), Love for Sale (1969), and many other books of poetry. His lifelong project is nearing completion: Bunting/Niedecker/Zukofsky.

CAROLYN KEMP. Lives and works in San Francisco.

MAURICE KENNY. Editor of Contact II (Brooklyn, New York); his latest book is from Chauncey Press: Is Summer the Bear.

KEVIN KILLIAN. Outside of these (27) contributors, my thanks to the following for their advice, info, directional signals, high hopes & good wishes: Dinah Bagley, Charles Bernstein, Neeli Cherkovski, Steve Chivers, Dennis Cooper, Ken Coupland, Elsa Dorfman, Kathleen Fraser, Alan Halsey, John Karr, Maureen Killian, Don Larventz, Harold Norse, James Ruggia, Mark Thompson; and Mina Harker; etc.

PAUL MARIAH. "Letter to Dorian Gray" appears, sans dedication, in Mariah's book This Light Will Spread: Selected Poems 1960-1975 (ManRoot, Box 982, South San Francisco). Now it can be told!

EDWARD MYCUE. Author of Damage within the Community (1973, 1977) and The Singing Man my Father Gave Me (1980). Soon to appear: Village.

ROBERT PETERS. "The Poet as 'Drag-Quean' " is taken from a long article on Beyond the State Capitol and published first in the Wieners number of Contact II. Don't forget to catch RP when he comes to your town as Elizabeth, Countess Bathory in The Blood Countess.

CHARLEY SHIVELY. Boston poet and editor; associated for many years with two newspapers: Fag Rag (Boston) and Gay Sunshine (SF).

AARON SHURIN. Poet, teacher, avatar & author of Giving Up the Ghost, The Graces and (we're waiting) Codex.

PAUL TRACHTENBERG. Is the author of Short Changes for Loretta and lives in Los Angeles. These poems on Disneyland will appear in PT's forthcoming book Making Waves to be published by Cherry Valley Editions. "Growing up, sex, surf culture."

BENJAMIN WEISSMAN. Produces the reading series at Beyond Baroque (Venice), is editing a prose anthology and (with Amy Gerstler) bringing out a book of haiku. Haikus? Haiku?

JOHN WIENERS. The Notebook of 1961 is a rescension of existing versions in the Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley and the Center for New Poetry, UC San Diego. -- "The Take for Granteds": The Fales

Collection, New York University. -- "Song for Diane di Prima's Musical": collection Robert Wilson. (Foye: "This poem writ spontaneously by JW in an autograph book at the Phoenix Book Shop, NY. Diane di Prima & JW were writing a musical called 'Shoot the President,' 'which we abandoned when somebody did,' said JW.") -- "Fame, great travel, speed . . ." (1967? transcribed from a tape recording made at St. Mark's, January 1968) -- "Solitary Pleasure": (1970?) collection Charley Shively --

JOHN WILKINSON. The author of the new Proud Flesh and an earlier book, Clinical Notes.

PAUL MARIAH LETTER TO DORIAN GRAY

for John Wieners

Desire's hawk dived . Your eyes,
Eyes of wanting, said your bed empty,
Yr arms, yr heart empty and

That you hid yr head
Under the pillow in order
Not to see the empty stead

At yr side . Also,
The stretched long neck
Of wanting crossed the room

And devoured what was not
Yours to have . The bolster
Leaves yr face wry .

The tears you cannot cry
Saddle you to white sheets
(Unaccustomed to lover's come,

Familiar only to young hustler's
tactless faces and ways:
"Suck my dick, make me come."

Coming out thru his paid teeth,
And you get off tired knees
Pointing to door to declare:

"Don't talk to me like that!"
And with final histrionic flare
"Get out!" closing the door

Loudly as he leaves. You shut
Off the light and crawl for/
To that ever-for empty bed --)

Only to dream of Cellini's
Master Pieces
Hung about you unscathed

In snow and yr footprints
Are the only ones around
The base of Male Presences.

A woman's voice cries
Out in yr dreamy mind and
You wake up to find

A poem on the back
Of yr mother's picture
And warm white heaven

All over yr already-old hands

June 11, 1968

EDWARD MYCUE STIGMA: MALE IN THE MIST

Gutturalization doesn't start in the throat.
When you guttle you eat greedily. It doesn't
start in the mouth. When a candle gutters,
you don't blame the flame for the wax that
spills away or the smokes that grow and frag-
ment when the wind fractures the wick heat.
When a man breaks-down like a blond baboon,
when his blood glues a brown shale to brain
circuits, when disheveled, frowzy, he becomes
ruddy and coarse, don't say he failed his prom-
ise, that his prologue bloomed without him.
Think ye comrades he caught up with time too
soon. Award him the red star of the commissar.
Senile so soon? Or give a name to his monkey,
pat his back, say, "Ah, it's Alzheimer's disease,"
the fallen bird, guide his feet. It's the mist.

ROBERT PETERS "THE POET AS DRAG 'QUEAN' "

Over half these writings are obsessed with legendary females, most of them film and cabaret stars. The grand dame presiding over all is Jackie Kennedy Onassis who is featured on the title page. Numerous collages/decoupages of stars both lend and receive energies from the poems around them; and we never forget that Wieners sees himself, like his alter egos, as an outcast, victim. His primary obsession is for Lana Turner (he relishes the tragedy over her lover Johnny Stompanato); others are for Alida Valli, forgotten star of the 40s and 50s, who deteriorated from excessive child-bearing, hepatitis, and the scars of a horrible Hispanic childhood; Marlene Dietrich, melancholiac of those early songs; Marilyn Monroe; Claire Trevor, among the most gifted actresses of her day who was never given roles that would have brought her real fame; Greta Garbo; Judy Garland; Bette Davis -- in short, great legendary women beloved of female impersonators and drag queens. Among cafe singers his goddess is Billie Holiday, with Peggy Lee. Wieners in a Charles Pierce of poetry!

He is moving when he assumes female voices, as he does Lana Turner's. Then, he's never campy. Rather, through these guises he works out the disturbing features of his own fragile psyche. Not only he is homosexual (these poems are steeped in the anguish of homosexual quests), but unlike most gays (contrary to the cliches) he feels more female than he does male. In "Yours to Take," his vision of himself is clear:

> There's a certain type of men
> born to suffer as women
> the worst kind
> who never marry and play around
>
> with their own kind....
> It's the women
> who have struck out in their suffering.

"While Miss Marlene Dietrich Was Singing" contains a gallery of sad, waiting women: Dietrich is one herself, the singer with "seven oceans of sorrow" in her voice. She is a girl in a Berlin bar bathed in neon, her hair covered with sequins. She is rich and lonely, as she paints her nails waiting for a lover who won't turn up. She is alone on a bridge, "the desperate woman, the/ woman left alone."

The archetypal abandoned female (men drove up to "slice off" her "thighs") appeared most unforgettably in Billie Holiday's songs, wher Wieners finds paradigms for himself -- the descent into drugs and booze, the brutalized life. "Billie Holiday," Wieners writes, "was the story/ of my whole life & still is." "Broken Hearted Memorys" recounts, in gentle lyric form, his having met Holiday in New York. He "went crazy afterwards," overwhelmed by her "sorrow her legacy holding hands under the table./ Billie's grey-hair was Parisian style and her/ singing Big Apple. She's still rotting nectarines."

In "Does His Voice Sound Some Echo in Your Heart," he sits drinking champagne, taking pills, and considering a paper sent by the state certifying him as "a mentally ill person." To imagine the horror of being utterly alone in such a circumstance boggles the mind. Rather than wallow in self-pity, Wieners diverts his "feeble nervous

system" to writing poems in women's voices.

In "Gardenias," a rich, marvellous poem, Wieners gender-fucks, assuming Holiday's persona. His failure to "hold" another man or woman occasions the blues. After twenty years of "drunken futility," he is nowhere, "sick of sickness in the heart:"

> Despite fur coats, and banquet tables, single ear-rings,
> poetry readings across the country, ideal communities
> and overseas, the spacious mists pall boulevards to
>
> lone candles in little moon-lit rooms above the city.

He is tired of literary success, of the coterie:

> it's a womanish heart
> growing old alone above the city, parallel horizontal
> to the snow
> wrapping herself up in the dreams of other men
>
> Have no mercy, they cry on the Fenway,
> their mesmerized eyes burn in the darkness,
> pushing herself on to the exhausation of love
> for a short eternity.

Most drag performers avoid the complete illusion that the female they impersonate materializes before your eyes. Part of the image is the outrage that the man wearing the eyelashes, wig, furs, boa, and sequins, remains a man. In some of his poems Wieners preserves this illusion by talking high camp. He "queans" it up with the best of the screamers who once held forth at tea dances in Manhattan and on Fire Island, before the Marlboro man, San Francisco levi-clone, took over the gay worlds. See his riffs of Babs Hutton (p. 123-4) and the glittering chatter that transpires between Simone de Beauvoir and Greta Garbo (pp. 168-70). What makes so many of Wieners' poems uncanny, though, is that he manages to be entirely convincing as a woman -- without showing five o'clock shadow. To the conservatives and bigots, the state psychiatrists, the entrapment police, these gender switches must seem like ultimate perversions.

CHARLEY SHIVELY JOHNJOB: EDITING BEHIND THE STATE CAPITOL OR CINCINNATI PIKE

After a decade there are now several sizeable Lesbian/gay presses -- Gay Sunshine, Alyson, Catalyst, New York Gay Press Association, Naiad. But in December, 1975, when Behind the State Capitol came off the press, published by the Good Gay Poets, the work signaled an emerging energy and possibility of gay publishing, which had yet to be realized. In 1973, Ian Young had edited The Male Muse, A Gay Anthology for Crossing Press and in 1975 Winston Leyland had edited Angels of the Lyre, A Gay Poetry Anthology, which Gay Sunshine Press published co-jointly with Panjandrum Press. These books demonstrated the range of gay male poetry, but gay groups at that time had yet to assemble the resources and capacities to publish a book the size of Behind the State Capitol. In 1974 & 75 we were only beginning to create our own medium.

In this creation, John Wieners looked to the Good Gay Poets because it was not established, because it represented a coming to flower of newly released and previously unrehearsed energies. When he gave me his run of Fuck You, A Magazine of the Arts, John hinted that the established is often (if not always) an obstacle to creation. As one of the Good Gay Poets collective, I saw our publishing as a way of bringing total freedom to authors, allowing each of us to write whatever and however we wished. What we needed most was not respect from the straight world but respect for each other's work.

In 1972, Jonathan Cape had published John Wieners' Selected Poems in England and had evidently requested first chance to publish his next book. But in the meantime amidst a merger mania, the publishing business began systematically dropping or reducing their poetry lines and increasing diet and cookbook offerings. In BTSC, John writes in a dedication of sorts, "This collection is in response to earlier requests from the hands of Allen Ginsberg, who was responsible for securing the success of my first international volume; to Tom Maschler for correspondence in pertinence over that forgoing compilation from contracted Author, Suit Ten, Forty Four Joy Street, Boston, Massachusetts. 723U S A 8376." (The latter phone & address are still in service.) Being turned down by Jonathan Cape (and their

American affiliate Grossman), the author turned to the O'Neil brothers who had just published James Merrill's the yellow pages (Temple Bar Bookstore, Cambridge, 1974). They asked Bill Corbett to read the Mss, and he suggested John should instead bring out a selection of the many uncollected and extraordinary poems which had appeared in magazines over the years. John included "William Corbett, the O'Neil brothers, phony book publishers" in his poem "To the Bad Debts in the United States Depts of the Treasury, Secret Service Duration" along with "insulin comas, convulsions, fifty-one thousand injections" which the so-called mental health profession had used trying to straighten out, to govern, to control his mind.

I was told by the straight men that they held me responsible for the publishing of that poem, that everyone knows John's crazy, but that I should know better. But my deficiency was in sharing -- in so far as I did share -- in their sanity and in failing to follow John's craziness sufficiently. One mistake was in trying to make the book like other books, to seem respectable, something you could give your straight friends for their birthday. The "Table of Contents" was John's work, but I tried to sort out the poems into discrete entities -- little jewels, when they were not that at all, but part of a life-long web strung together in a singular and erratic rhythm. When John read at New York's St. Marks in 1968, he read by jumping within the book from poem to poem -- taking a part here, another part there, and weaving them together for a singular performance. "Joan Crawford was in only/ one film, written, starred and directed by herself, and, as she would say:/ I'm still living it, through my loves, acting myself." (BTSC, 200)

In editing BTSC, I deleted a few notes here and there, which I now regret, but I took nothing out without John's allowance. If I didn't understand something, I'd ask John to read it aloud to me -- perhaps hoping that he too would see some weakness. So I asked him about "Dante Sweeting Watching Upon Virgin Appearances/ Appearances of Virgil's Beatrice:" (BTSC, 139) Being a hard core atheist, I had no appreciation for appearances of the Virgin Mary -- but many's the Boston faggot that she visits regularly. She came to John through the silver dressing mirror of his own dead mother. Here is the epicenter of BTSC, which I had not only missed but had wanted to

delete. Nel mezzo del cammin di mostra vita/ mi ritrovai per una selva oscura,/ che la dirita via era smarrita -- can be compared to 1952: "Beyond this river which I have no desire to cross/ There are mountains which I have no desire to climb/ I am fenced in by rivers and mountains/ And though year's day goes, I feel no loss." (BTSC, 1) Behind the State Capitol had been projected as the first part of a work which included two additional books, Under Bismark Bridges and Marble Harbor. Most of John's Purgatorio had been assembled and was in manuscript, before he simply threw it away and abandoned the whole project. Failure to understand BTSC must surely be one of the greatest failures in the history of criticism.

While I can only share in the failures, I take great pleasure in what I was able to do in getting the work out. The text arrived in what I took to be essentially a finished form; John had worked for several years with an intern from Boston College in typing, rewriting and assembling. An example of his editing shows in his use of earlier published work. John includes only about ten percent of the original Playboy of the Western World (Good Gay Poets, 1972; sometimes incorrectly listed as We Were There!), a mimeographed travelogue of our trip to Miami to protest the 1972 conventions. His editing consists not in "improvements" but in hacking, stuffing and reshelving; the subtitle of the book gives a key: Cinema decoupages; verses, abbreviated prose insights. Decoupage literally means "cut out" -- decoupage is "the technique of decorating a surface with cutouts, as of paper."

Here the work of illustration must be studied closely. The layout is the combined effort of Mitzel, John and myself. The cover was taken from a portfolio John had glued together for carrying the manuscript. Sometimes Mitzel or myself laid out something too obvious; John would overlay & shred the illustration in order to reassemble the image to his liking. At times, he'd replace an illustration. "En-Route" originally was laid out with a picture of the Dallas motorcade; John pulled that up & replaced it with labels from my undershirt and his straw hat. Other times he giggled happily over one of Mitzel's or my own collage.

Typesetting was first done by Alan Davies on a cooperative

Compugraphic machine; unfortunately the fluid was stale and in the course of a hot, humid summer, the whole text literally vanished. Then Rick Kinman retyped the work on an earlier IBM typesetting machine which used a ball to put each letter directly on the page. I told him to flush left everything & we could space verses in layout. As a result, everything got typed flush left, which created a number of chance linebreaks. The only places, which this made much difference were in the Whitman-Swinburnesque lines. The abbreviated prose insights and the short verse lines were not affected. I took the text to John & insisted that about ten poems should be retyped to recover the spacing. He insisted more strongly that the text be retained as it came from the machine. The random & jumpy quality provided interesting textures which blended strangely within the flush left.

Mitzel, Sal Farinella and myself all proof-read various stages of the galleys. I took each idiosyncratic spelling, spacing or accident which we found to John for his approval. He found this process annoying and upbraided ne by saying that they would hold it against us if there were no mistakes in the book. In several places, he made clear the importance of his own spellings as in the last verse of "Gardenias/ Blue songs of The poetess' heart." "Have no mercy, they cry on the Fenway,/ their mesmerized eyes burn in the darkness,/ pushing herself on to the exhausation of love/ for a short eternity." When this first appeared in Fag Rag (January, 1973), I had corrected "exhausation" to the standard spelling; for the book, John changed it back the way he wanted. He used "exhausation" to capture the breathless sensation of the poetess seeking love in the bushes.

Much yet needs doing to grasp what those who pride themselves on their sanity label schizophrenic. Even so avant-garde a writer as Bruce Andrews posits/proposes that there is a sanity, against which to measure, himself, society, sex. In The L=A==N=G=U=A=G=E Book, he writes about BTSC, "The soundless permeating of madness upon sanity: would this be the quandary gotten by viewing the language as a cure for the artistry? As a rebuff to social order, to emotional and perceptual order?" One thing the straight man always worries about is being in control -- a sexual illusion many women are now refusing to perpetuate. In language/verse/writing/speaking a continuous mon-

itoring keeps everything within certain unspoken limits. What John does in BTSC is not to argue or wrestle with these limits but to spin along more often than not without limits. Spelling, indiscriminate promiscuity, broken hearted memories, capitalization are all behind him as he careens along on the Cincinatti Pike.

Thus in a programmatic poem of sorts, "Sequel to a Poem for Painters," he contemplates not so much that night in the Hotel Wentley as:

Eight
T
E
L
E
phones in 3 years
b l a c k, bronze
grn, wall bed, red white etc.
coffee s ill.

The T-E-L-E-phone becomes a part of uncontrollable voices coming in so incessantly that the machine has to be crushed to pieces on the window sill; needing resedimentation, the coffee's ill, you know, poisoned by sane critics in their pens,

"Get him out of my head, now they quote
he's a GREat poet, put him back to hbed.
Get rid of him." Home after work, for what
B o a r d:Tele vision, never cocktails.
Greasy hamburgers I got
cooking now, you're getting out
of hand
small potatoes over
close, call, filly smoke. (BTSC, 76-77)

Happily John Wieners has received a Guggenheim grant & can get his potatoes better done but the greater recognition only increases the intense scrutiny of the poetry police. In the same poem, he writes that

Government means currency
parenthetically government without currency means government
less subterfuge ranean.

In the past such government has restrained most editors. Thus the 1972 Selected Poems included few of the breath-taking Asylum Poems, and the Black Sparrow edition of the Compleat John Wieners runs the danger of following the governors and loosing the subterfuge of the subterranean. Castro now suggests that those who are in debt to the U.S. bankers repudiate their debts -- some 350 billion dollars outstanding in Latin America alone. Behind the State Capitol attempted to repudiate those government-currency debts and operate on the poetess' own idiosyncratic anarchistic currency. Will the governors succeed? As John writes elsewhere "It is a difficult place. Mosquitoes bite there too, but they draw a diffident blood. That is the difference, and we are doomed if we allow them to enter the sacred places

where the secrets convene."

AARON SHURIN "at the pulling of invisible strings"

One that has been not just lovely but useful for me . . . How JW lives out his broken-sweethearted fairy persona, dignifies it . . . That act that makes coming out a declaration of faith, spoken amidst the bullshit and fears towards an intuition of possible beauty. That you're broken, "trapped", is not yours but the social, especially JW's time, but that you speak your longing is individual indomitable volition and vision. Broken, maybe, but also broken through.

"A Poem For Trapped Things", its subversion of distress by wonder. I read, inevitably, fairy wings into the butterfly, Wieners' "red robe" if he'd get up and spread it. How much, for me, the content is mutated by a homosexual iconography. "A giant fan on the

back of/ a beetle", indeed, our scurrying, squashable, defensive personae lifted ("with the enormous bale/ of their desire") by the incessant dreaming a calling to dangerous love wings out of us, closety carapace completely belied by coy and fluttering fan. The valiant/manqué female Hollywood images, beloved of gay men in search of viable animas, sparkle here in subtext: "we could/ vanish from sight like the puff/ off an invisible cigarette" lit, no doubt, by Paul Henreid and passed to Bette Davis, nobly toasting their fading romance with the intermingling of their smoky sighs, the coordinated heaves of their inhale/exhalations; or "blue diamonds" à la Monroe proving their value only in relation to MM's yeasty vulnerability. I'm yanking out the subtext in vocabulary from its lyric concordance because that helps locate for me a JW facing his soul as butterfly I think I recognize, know. Could it be beside the point that I first encountered this poem around 1970, at an initial meeting of what was to become the Good Gay Poets in Boston, read by Charley Shively to those of us come, after all, to pursue our pursuit of the poem in a place where we could comfortably spread our wings? It's a natural: our coming out, like dingy caterpillar, from cocoon of fear of eros into <u>display</u>; the lure, command, and dazzle of sexual delight. There's humility in JW's encounter, the self before the glorious other; but also somehow that we don't just see it, we <u>be</u> it.

PAUL TRACHTENBERG 7 POEMS IN A SEQUENCE

THE MAGIC KINGDOM

The key unlocked
wax pirates with real souls,
who pillaged Walt's subterrane.
Kegs & casks, and mechanical alley cats --
fixtures of this Caribbean inferno.

The French Quarters filled
with filigrees and fritters.
Mint juleps and a Creole trio
strummed blues, furnished
the Quarter's cobbled roads.
Blue Bayou cafe complete
with Walt's animated fireflies.
"A swamp town Lady" spirit.

GROOMED FOR THE OCCASION

Topiaries were everywhere,
mainly in fantasyland.
Stiff green giraffes,
elephants, bears & seals
intrigued visitors waiting
to board the Small World.
Only the privets and boxwood
felt mistreated and misshapen.

WALT'S CONTINUUM

Visitors begged for boredom
to even the score.
Cliches were can canning

There were real plants; impatiens, bottlebrushes,
flax on Tom Sawyer's Island,
banana plants and philodendrons
inhabitating Jungleland.
Petunias & marigolds designed
Mickey Mouse's face.
California oaks & varieties of acacias --
the Chumash spirit.

"AND THE BEAT GOES ON"

Jamborees, dances, characters & bands
adrenalized the land -- a passion
of protoplasm and synapses
of eclectic visions.
Piano roles waved main street
possessing visitors
on horse-driven trollies.

Dill pickles and cider &
Daisy Duck lollipops
excited their esophaguses.
Recycled Goofies, Mad Hatters,
Winnie the Poohs, red popcorn stands,
& Disney's special taffy
stapled the everyday new faces.

WALT'S BACKBONE

The hunt for spilled popcorn,
a must performance in Everyland.
Not a kernel unpreyed upon,
swept into sweepers' traps.
Aztec ritual.

The tired hunters
drowned their weary bodies

with exotic prospects
that lurked in dark corners.

Some tracks reached a precipice;
The Mule Train Pack was shelved
after some visitors kept
sliding off saddles.

THINKING WAS BANNED

Tweedle Dee & Tweedle Dum
were jesters in this kingdom.
Eclectic themes gushed like geysers.
White fudge was Walt's cologne.
Chocolate encircled children's smiles.

Walt's studio films
melted in all the lands.
Davy Crocketts on keel boats
and deerskin canoes.
Robinson's tree house
was a dominant shade
for the jungle cruise's
electric zebras & hippos.

"Have an apple dearie." echoed
from the skyways of tomorrow
to the Matterhorns of Fantasyland.

FLOWER PASSAGE

Thank God for corns and blisters
Moving on foot was a relief
from elevations.
Tweaks of pain kept real images intact.

in lost virginities
of monorail girls.

BENJAMIN WEISSMAN MOMKILL

When a gun is pointed at your forehead you think of your mother and all the nice things she's done to you before you think of all the cruel ones.

So, you think of the day there was no one to play catch with. You're throwing a baseball against a comforting chainlink fence: a blunt shimmering percussion, your companion, a noise. Your mother steps outside, watches you. There isn't anything you've done she hasn't observed. After all, you are hers. She made you. For the one hundredth time you invite her to play catch and for the first time she accepts. When you hand your mother an oiled leather mit, purchased by her husband, your dad, she says, just a couple of tosses, not too much. That's right. Remember, everything in moderation, or else something will happen. Don't drink three gallons of milk at midnight. After 90 long seconds, it's over. Fun. You played. Played with Mom. And she's okay, she's real good, not a slobbering tyrannical witch, pinching you with her claws. This is on record, in the scrap heap of your memory. Boring, but memorable.

You've thought about being killed all your life. Molested by average people. Poisoned, tortured, eaten, made a mockery of -- so it's kind of a relief that this gun is finally here, pointed at you. You stare at it. And the only thing keeping you from kissing this barrel, your port or cubby hole, is ridicule, sexual fear: you don't want to give the gun a blow job. My son sucks off guns? Never. Have you seen him?

You've held a gun just like this one at your own head, uncertain where to drill the holes. The temple, the left eye, straight up from the chin, or maybe you'd prefer the heart? A garden of choices.

But you're not holding the gun: this other person is going to decide how it's done. Not angry, this calm person confuses you because they're not angry. You wonder, how can someone kill another without anger? You picture your own anger and how you couldn't

express it because.... because you knew it was lethal, lethal as a kiss, perhaps, igniting big fires; a world aflame that could kill someone, if not yourself. And that's who we're worrying about now.

So you say Mother. Then Mom. Then you say, preciously, Mommy, and your head unhinges at the neck. Bring up those two sweaty hands. Better catch that skull. A face in your hands with eyes that can't be shut tight enough. Of course self-pity follows. And nauseates you. Now, one of those hands clutches your stomach. This is how I truly see you. I've always pictured you like this. Pitiful, with room to worsen; always willing to sink deeper.

And your mother loved to see you vomit. She says, it's so . . . Bending over you, rubbing your stomach, inspecting her foul spaghetti pumping out, nibbling on your ear, playing with your hair, blowing cool air on sweat spots: and when you finish she sets you up on a program of rehabilitation that makes you sick again, much sicker. She sings, you are God's perfect child.

The person pointing the gun says if you make the slightest move you're a dead man. You stop yourself from saying, but I always have been a dead man. You're so frightened and all the heart warming things about her are bubbling up ahead of the bad.

Remain frozen and silent. That's a good statue. She trained you at the beauty parlor. You were entitled, SON WAITING FOR MOTHER. A darling picture. Now I can title you, DEAD FELLOW, or WORTHLESS MELTING MAN, or LET'S LAUGH.

Now you don't even know what your mother looks like. She went away. Who is my mother? You peer into the barrel, once again, assisting you: what would you do without it? This is home. It's the opaque projector beaming an image into your brain. She's coming back, she's filling out: a skull and cross bones, a mushroom cloud, ten hypodermic needles, a log cabin of flaming home style feces. No, you haven't forgetten her. You'll never ever forget that pink leathery face, blistered raw in sadism and paranoia. The salami chopper. And nature superimposed her spirit right into you. Stained and ironed flat. That's beautiful.

It's good you have no appetite because there isn't anything for you. You are out. So you rummage. A large hunting dog bites you in

the throat. You return home and knock on the front door. Your mother opens the barrier and finds her pale-faced product blood soaked. She screams and faints onto the sofa. You run up some smelling salts, pull her back to consciousness, lay a cool rag on her forehead.

Have you decided who is actually holding this gun? He or she wears a colorful ski mask to keep you guessing. There's something homey about this terror. It's your natural habitat. Your mother, you put her through everything; so much slaving -- ungrateful child. Is she holding the gun? Or, maybe it's a friend of hers? The husband, perhaps. Your father? Yes. No? They were friends before they became lovers and people of wedlock. Don't be jealous, you've slept with both of them.

Your father never did anything wrong. Nicest fellow in the world, and your mother could kill him for it. You remember the time he walked you across the street. You took his hand. He held a lit cigar. The red hot tip burned your palm. And now your father's hand always burns your palm and the smell of cigar smoke smothers your brain. He dropped you down a flight of stairs, once. He was carrying too many bags of trash.

An apology is in order. Yes, you should be grateful. You saw the world. And it's your responsibility, right? Thank you.

But you haven't finished. I want to hear about the bad half, the real rotten things. Yes, I'm enjoying this ride. I want a complete catalogue. Very much so.

You were dead before this story began, and you will die again upon its ending. Try to say something. Tell me how you're feeling. Tell me about this friendly town. Don't worry if it's garbled, I'll understand. Come on, you can do it. Redeem yourself. That's right, you can do it. I'm only trying to help. Good. Good. Spit it out.

NOTES FROM A JOURNAL, 1961

SATURDAY, JUNE 10

Rain today and I can go in Boston
without slang, see two films, the old ro-
mance "The Third Man" and with it, "The
Blue Angel" 2 chances to penetrate Romance
depending on the surroundings Symphony
Hall and Huntington Avenue, the old
red brick fronts along Huntington where
the Boston "Armory" stands. To walk
in my trenchcoat as she does Anna by him
in the cemetery unknowing apparently,
caught up in the grief of Harry just laid away.
As Blanche does in Streetcar, moth of the
city named Desire. Who is she? and why am
I devoted to them, these emblems of a false
existence, dedicated to one man and where does
he sleep now and how while away his Saturday
afternoons?
She walks out in a lace blouse and
memories blow like whistles from a red stone
house.
How keep the memory of that figure with us for
the day.
Oh fresh irises their scent
in supper clubs.

Is it enough that wind blows
And faithful sparrows (two of them go
Under the rapid transit roof).

MONDAY, JULY 10

And I remember the days of traveling

White kerchiefs waved at the window
train lists, bus schedules leaving town on
the 4th of July, the lighter luggage the better

Plane trips, friends gathered in non-existent circles.
Now I have the clothes for travel, cashmere coats
reversible raincoats, button-down scarves, French
shirts, bands for starched collars, buttons.

With fireworks overhead, spreading out in flares.
Oh the days of traveling, up and down stairs,
high as the skyrockets in the sky, of different hue.
I never see a train go by, but I think of you.

FRIDAY, JULY 14

The Pyramid Text

God
over the turbu-
lent sea shall send down rain
by which living man may bathe again
his soul jump in the surf that saves it
from madness, pursuit of demons, drawbacks to the Kiss.

Holy waters over the edge of cold marble, fount for the foundation of triads, marked upon the brow, frown of dry devils, drawn bow in the arms of Cupid destroys even by image, the true man settling into eternal bliss.

FRIDAY, JULY 21 THE CHALICE

Against the darkening a light
Against the confinement a lock left loose.
Against the abuse of my own body I promise a
gift most divine. Thou most base servant
speaks of the time when upon thy ears falls no more
the clatter of jangling steel. Nor the shining of
"terrible crystal". Only the upward gift of gold.
Swilling over the sides, the consecration. More
and more the anointed jars stay full.
Further and further the line points up
and down eternal. Rod of most heat that
burns with no fire or light.

THURSDAY, JULY 27

To keep on writing; writing keeps
one on; on writing without a story/line,
to have nothing to say, even though
the bird song out these windows is
enough. Even though out these windows
is a world I have not despaired of
yet; and I wait to be released out
into it. And we can say the poem is
a bird song. Just that, fading in-
to silence, it lasts just as long.
Justice's song, fading into the light.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 3

Neglected clover and ragweed,
Found in a field gone to seed.
Such as me
Are in need of thee
Each hour of the day
And night.

The spiritus rector of our fate
Found in dreams, streams of country brooks
books, looks of half-hearted desire.
These hire the continual pressure of love.
Found neither below nor above but constant
in the gentle dropping of small rain.
If it is here then I shall find it. If it
can be found, then I'll be around.

The day withdraws, each day a lessening of the true life, trials by which we are judged. Do we defile any? How we suffer the passing of each hour, turning the Kaleidoscope. No more to taste the sweet elixir of love. Nectar of friendship but always seeking, pushing the old from out, aside that new presences may inhabit. The new swings its own form, causing a breathing space.

Death and Babylon

And how will I face it but turn my face aside, back to the wall from whence it comes. Not recognize it in emerald green rags. The beggar by the roadside. The mad by the cemetery walls. Laughing at some secret joke that expands into a universe that explains all one needs to know about the daily proximity of dying.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 10

Some days it is not possible to do more than exist, some days just to get through hearing the snow drop in her outstretched hand. And seeing the tops of swaying pine trees. What little breeze there is,

it is enough to refresh my soul, hidden
with the crown jewels under His throne.

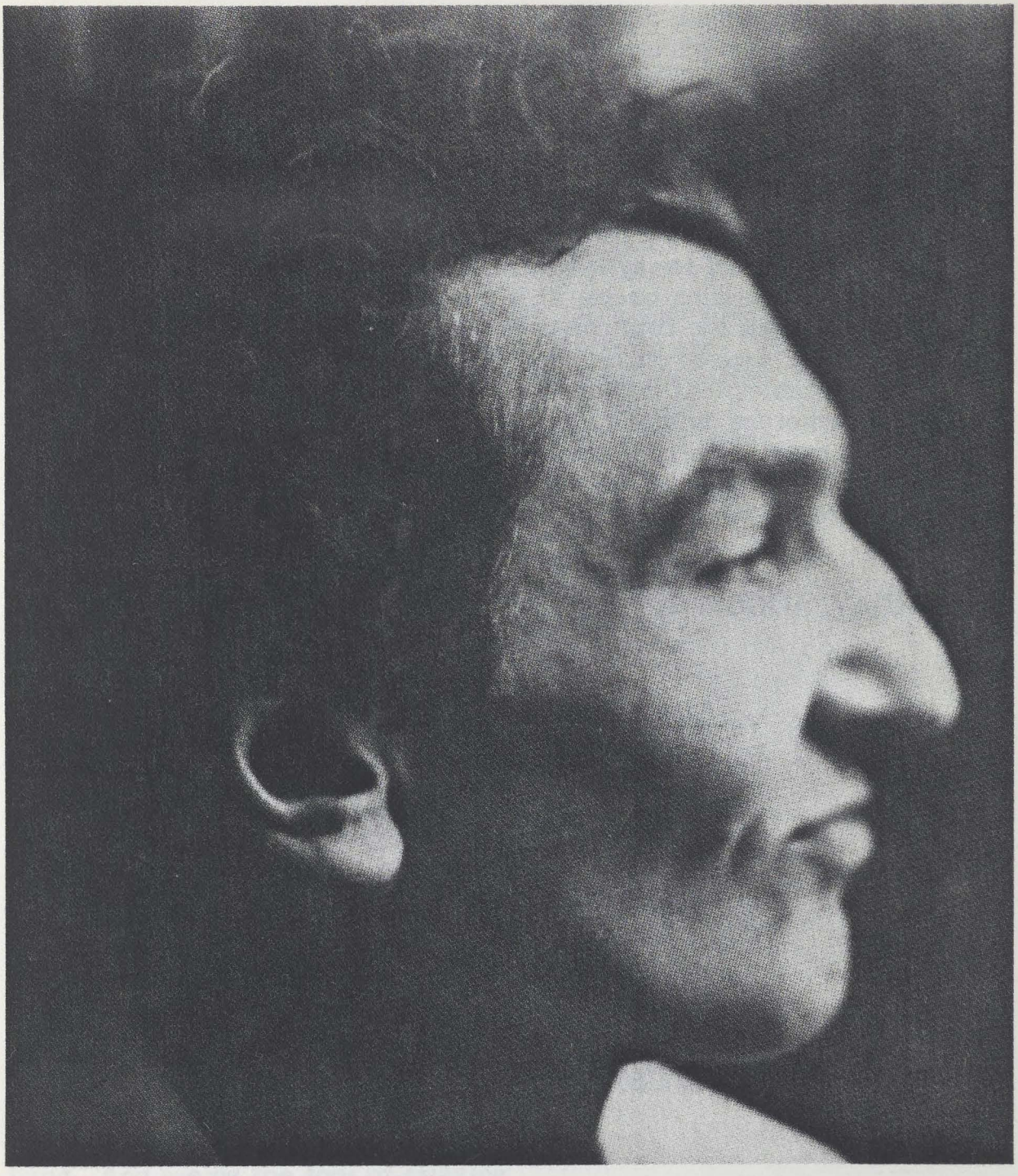
WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 16

I now come to find writing a poem is the most
sacred act of my existence. I was wrong in
1959's journal to say it was no holier
act than passing waste. It is the accumulation
of all days, the first spear into the
exposed face of chaos. For despite the
time tables that is what we live in. And
to set order on that face, the face of that
is a dream itself. For what is a dream
and whose face appears in it but the
Sacred Master who dictates all things.

MONDAY, AUGUST 21

AUGUST

To meet an old friend on the church steps
Is indeed a pleasure on recollection.
But to lose your mind, suffer amnesia,
as the Winter and Fall tides drift by.
This of course is an offense to God, whom
we cherish most by the old bedpost or
the open altar out under the pines.
This is the place we worship: each stone
A slide from a different state. Each slide
a piece of the whole, like the atoms of
The brain. Which can only walk in the
rain. Singing love songs to itself.



John Wieners c. 1966 by Elsa Dorfman

TUESDAY, AUGUST 22

You ask me what the day engenders
Hidden in a cranny here.
Nothing, no more than what the wild wind squanders
Putting all its power, bear, sparrow, crow
or Hijinks in the boughs of a glittered tree.

My days are numbered on the turning gyre.
And at their numbering the butterflies
return to haunt me of time spent out of
This grim wood. Whether the mad screech-
ing on the wind where the days pass by fast as fire
In the hollow corners of my world, my
mind, my days, all pass by unaccounted for.

Melody lost melody. The grim pall does not affect the butterfly at my foot nor slow moving of leaves in the wind. Nor still the bumblebee in the bachelor button or move the ladybug upon my shirt. It's rather like a newspaper clipping of an old friend you allow to fall out of a book never to stoop over or retrieve. Finding a little thatch by the side of a path to sit upon. Pausing where some birds flew yesterday.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 24

The fog flung over the fields.

The dew heavy on the individual stalks of grass or weed. The beetles making just the right sound in the woods, and on the top of the highest tree, a bird cackling.

The smell of green weeds on the pathway.

Whitman's poems to MANHATTAN, 'Give me

the splendid silent sun' all the crowds
now dead.

And in the day I am tormented by the memory
of warm supper clubs at night, never crowded,
the way a young man opens the door, Mambah singing
there, as Mabel Mercer, on a kitchen chair.

For I have looked down into the pit and turned away
trembling.

SEPTEMBER 1

O the salmon rose bush is in blossom
As I read Collected Poems of Ole' Possum.
And the smell of the garden invades this room
Piecing my memory/bringing on gloom.

I have stood on deck in summer -- the prow of the ship
and pawed through old photographs. I have sat
on deck in summer -- back of the house / where the waves went
under the porch and seen far out to sea, seagulls
nestling on whitecaps.

Sister's Labor

frowned face, darning like lace a cigarette hole
in my trousers. Blue cord, she has sewn up the pocket
tear already.

I forget the answer to the question
And even the question slides into oblivion.

SEPTEMBER 21

Take Your Feet Off My Ankles

Wrists that held bracelets, fingers
that held rings
Oh where are all those things. In
love's last light lost.

SEPTEMBER 22

The terrible night falling upon the house.
Empty rooms, adown Titanic glooms where
at the bottom, heart, base there is only peace.

The glass knobs on the bureau shine as
white pieces of diamond-amber. It is
here where the poem lights the bourgeois
darkness of this room that the devil works.
Lurks. Larks. Let the line, the word
stand perched on the ten glass knobs that
are screwed into a stained red wood.
Above the tutankh of a keyhole is
another glass knob. I would prefer to say
crystal doorknob that opens onto shadows.
Dews. Night bride of another day.

SONG

For Diane di Prima's Musical

time slips by
in the wink of an eye
one hour has gone
and you're ready to fly

off your rocker at dawn.
Riders in the sky, born
with horse, sense here's
a brand new baby that's torn

up, time on my hand, stop the clock, the years
run out in a day, the fears
of the future turned around
To hope now in your soul wears

wings. The ground the ancients found
why walk when you can fly grey hound
who's hot on the track of a fast rabbit
after the man, Further time out bound

with an oil burner habit
at Forty Eigth and Madison, Babbitt
takes his train to Jersey by
Five] the sea, fine twenty nine, grab it

man, the rides on me

[July 10, 1963. 7:55 p.m.]

STATIONARY

I'm thinking of last evening, the feelings had
lying on the bed, dreaming of boys,
old poets,
Bob Kaufman, seeing him on 8th Street
his hair burning out of his head.
A cigarette smoking in my hand.

A white sweater on corduroy trousers
Hearing voices of fresh lovers on the radio
next door, their spirits rush, you must
remember their kisses their soft murmurings
in the dark, like fundamental things apply
as transient storms return the centaurs.

[@ 1966-67]

SOLITARY PLEASURE

I wanted a companion, even a lover
to fill the empty mornings, as I knew them
on Columbus and California, but you guarded your
house too well, and the old days were over,
the old nights of jazzing around. You returned to the country alone
with your wife, and children, and I have grieved ever since.

By the seashore, in bed it was worse, days I thought it over
but nights you came back, harder then, whispering under the sheets

I see my hands getting older, and poison smoke playing over the air.
It's only memory of youth I yearn for, what I knew as a boy
the true romance of being loved, waiting for death
that never came, except when one kissed goodbye.

Pressed down by memory, I recollect hours of youth
burning brightly in evening air, how did it go, where
except now I wind up at the Plaza, with no dreams at all.

Pressed flowers fall out of a book, blue and yellow
bound together, it's better than a hotel lobby, or a
lonely tea room, buffeted out of winter snows.

It is the last day of the week, and hard-working shop girls
give thanks the weekend is here, but I have nowhere
to go, no one to see, only the old lantern on the path
to herald someone who never comes back, who has never come here.

"FAME, GREAT TRAVEL, SPEED, BEAUTY -- YOUTH . . ."

Fame, great travel, speed, beauty -- youth
If the dreams of one's youth don't come true
what is one to do? Search out a new beginning?
Start over again? It's no use, one's even forgotten
the grief he's used to get through

Try avenues, behind blue bushes, under
lights in the park, perhaps he is there, waiting
obscured from view. I doubt it, though. Love
goes shallow after a year or two

Try riches, fame, a new name
no one's to blame if the hollow game
of finding yourself same in the mirror's too tame
The flame's burnt out, no fault if the love's a lout

The shadowed doubt you can share, ah there
he waits in your heart alone the awful ache
of the written word you cannot write, the
spite of rhyme one uses to disguise paucity of thought

No blot if what you've got's not real any more
How far you've come from the slums of the dumb past,
Ask -- you shall become. But if the dream's succumbed to,
is even forgot, in vain, hopes on your pillow remain
past longing. Plans to write, dormant pits of apathy

Reality seems far away, as cowardice, before
one even begins, It's no sin, you wind up taking
Heroin -- that's an end. To only begin again.
Great thoughts breed great deeds. Outside my door
I need hope, salvation to restore, someone who waits

Who was not there before or if he was
Gone now, to return in the night bearing great heat and light
Behind the bridge, over the waters I stand, Moon
outstretched in my hand. Who pick it up? Who honor me
With a kiss of mystery? Who redeem this longing? Who
press their face to my hands? Who restore my rightful owner?
Who to erase, oh debts, from this ledger?

THE TAKE FOR GRANTEDS

Past Duchamp as though his mother were sainted
as though his sister continues prophecies against politician's wives,
in Rosanno Schiaffano's mind, actually a black tiger against
rags of reportage. Emilia, I died for you, it's true,
a face honest, brave and courageous,
that may take a bullet wound,
hacked by outrageous sound from
indigenous wounds off ancient coins.

Thelma Mary Patricia Ryan

January 6, 1970

Bedouin CARPE DIEM

Unseating Lex Barker, re-enacting Baum
the decline and Fall of the Roman Empire
is heresy, on whose grounds, playing Lynn
favorites, say at court no matter where upon nature
COQUETTE, age 10
~~mead~~, amidst African citizens over masters' son
of history and time outs reply through tenets circuit
from superiors; when you cannot read or write
what do your words support besides faulty

architecture. Poverty spirits sexual ignorance

For Gongora

Bedouin CARPE DIEM

Unseating Lex Barker, re-enacting Baum
the decline and Fall of the Roman Empire
is heresy, on whose grounds, playing Lynn
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coquette, amidst age 10 African citizens over masters' son
of history and time outs reply through ~~tenants~~ circuit
from superiors; when you cannot read or write
what do your words support besides faulty

architecture. Poverty spirits sexual ignorance

For Gongora

tenets

BIDING IN THE GLOOM

My new work which I presume
already lies scattered, lost and
in error prompts memories of

a dark address in Hell's Kitchen
The upper storey all one floor Mick
but what I should remember; it was

New York and I had a book-keeping job
in Greenwich Village; all summer and
into the winter, at a private residence on

West 8th. We lived near the East river over
a laundromat, taking the West bound bus
to work. Glory and grand illusory spectacles.

The shrine of devotion to Manhattan
Gotham shows mad weirdos and hi-jinx.
Nothing like it is now on Beacon Hill.

from
SHE'D TURN ON A DIME
(1983-4)

HE AIN'T FOR REAL

Did you ever
think of Jack
Dempsey, the one

who makes females
genital organs; the
middle weight champ-

ion of the world! that
he's for Real, that women
aren't supposed to be

as real as they are

To Carol Bergè

Training one's self to adversity is impossible; you're either born to it or not. There are ways of combatting illness.

Drink, eat and be merry
for tomorrow we die.

I often think of a friend in need because I so frequently find myself demanding oleaginous texts from the fibres of our everyday life.

I don't mean books, any longer, but their spur, pen's prompting or sword.

We have Laura in the time with the Consul.
We have Dottie Ford back in municipal affairs.

And the faults of Malta after Gertrude Eberle and Flo "Babe" Zacharias swam the English Channel.

To offset Minetta.

"NOVEMBER 7"

November 7, re-entry
to yesterday's thrill happy
explorers as we set out jaunty
in service to Caiphas Papa

touring the bedizined haunts
of jalopy teen-aged
FIFTY Pashas
years, unearthing again
the marvellous hideouts and
rendez-vous of our college days.

Bad marks irk
Maturity; schools Term spark
discipline. Once hit
a shot miss

takes little into account as
measure beside eight solid
double semesters with Jesuits.

1946-1954. A pasture
tilled in harmony upon
the Trail of lusty
growing body.

ORIENTAL SONJA

Now my pants are tight
and my white teeth flash right

big pockets of bucks, hard up all night
looking for that low-class Jewish fight.

It's not exactly Kosher, it's down there New York
taut fly; curved behind manor's remark

men dirty my hair, lonely legs parked like dark
Maltese Falcons model Sam's erotic spark.

Saint Ann's Scotland Yard
Serial Librarian

About himself, the author writes;

he is a tireless worker, and has a very long memory. Having forgotten what ensues, the anger of redundancy rises in a very lustful nature: he drinks like a fish.

Crowded cupboards combine with scrap heaps disht! There is no man to be feared in judicial canon more than this male harlot.

SIR KENNETH CLARK'S NUDE HAREM GODDESS

Could Sir Walter Raleigh, Helen Keller and Shirley
Temple be the same person, working for Fanny Farmers

unbeknownst to Saint Gregory's parochial schoolyard
as a Jewish niece and a former mental patient dormers

like guards to back rooms one may only meet after black mass
in Venice on their solid ranch house wareham hills

man disdains for the Chinese water-torture room;
a Swan

THE CHURCH ORATOR SOCRATES

as Helen of Troy
was Lombardy
while the widow
remains Lombard

Priam Frieze
Husbands sweeps
astrological houses
Dueling pistols or
great balls of cannon & fodder

cancer X capricorn

VELEZ SAKE

The cha-cha bombast
so unknown to me, as that

most glamorous chauffeur,
a dress-maker's dummy

dreaded in West Roxbury, Chi-chi
has become a matter of inquiry.

How many sittings, canteen
music-hall yaket y-yaks

Or junker travesty suck ass,

In fide for experiences, like SAIS
when perished youths distrust hazard.

To compare her to the Bar reveals inconnu
aghast underlinings report nefarious such

good tidings choice become thee.

JOHN WILKINSON A SUPERFICIAL EXAMINATION OF THE POETRY OF JOHN WIENERS

Inevitably, as flow of information becomes less inflected by any voluntary system of belief or ethics to which knowledge is conformed at its moment of production -- when neutral is the ideological gear --, the individual voice, if it would inflect that flow rather than spout as one more gargoyle, must accept recourse to outrageous artifice and theatricality. Not, indeed, to reproduce the fetishism of commodities on the level of culture (although for most of us this alone halts and stutters the flow of information with some snag of desire

> that sure entrance to a
> storied paradisical garden, where pure
> patented mystique fulfills its indispensable acts)[1]

but at least to refuse flagrantly, the invisibility of the ideological world. There is necessary falsehood, poetically and personally, in this theatre; the mandarin revolutionary and truth-seeker, the working-class poet contentious of the tongue's colonisation, collude in the dandified figure of the poète maudit who maintains a poise against drugs, poverty and madness, only by virtue of utopian irony. Plain speaking is enabled through radical ventriloquism, since integrity was bought in on the cultural exchange to underpin 'freedom'. Ventriloquially, John Wieners is the master -- the so-called 'John Wieners' behind or in front of such dissertations as 'Gusta with Madame Simone de Beauvoir' and 'A Superficial Estimation':

> The Austrian aristocracy has not declined. We all sat there, the Empress and I, the stars, the foreign accents, the shifting profiles, the glancing eyues, the telltale brows, and the forms of experience became elegant, enraptured, and carved as if from Thomas Edison, with the postures and movements, gestures and positions of well-ordered monarchs, all assuming courtesy and consideration towards those who profess eagerness to share in the virtue of art.[2]

But from the artifice, there is a rebound in life's "ordinary,

accustomed passage" with the recognition of "what I mean, just to others," and more exactly so, just where the own-act does stem from -- any number of received gestures with brand names and places of origin quietly whited-out in nomine the personal and original, subsumed to the voice or body's most intimate movements. And whoever does like John Wieners, determine to inflect the world lyrically, to glimpse some proper place beyond the broken arc of his or her cadence, may terribly damage the echoed self, turning such insistence to a lying-out the corpse, teasing where the ganglia trail from, false trails and true paths through the woods and entertainment industry. This project is Behind the State Capitol, a great dissecting-table, but with an earnest too of great conception. Here mess (information as visceral and bilious) co-exists with artifice in a transvestite relation, but where neither claims original status, whatever the history of individual poems might suggest. And most importantly, results poesy of an extremely unusual lyric pitch.

John Wieners' poems since The Hotel Wentley Poems had seemed to flatten and to textualize, in ears tuned to Victorian cadence in English verse, dying fall and swoops, loss-as-moral-glory, or to the celebratory tenor of Norte Americano voracious appetite and forward phrasing. A recording of the later Wieners[3] reveals a capriciousness of vocal performance, stretching and snapping, fracturing and smelting, comparable with a British camp comedian like Kenneth Williams -- and a stand-up comic's complicit timing is certainly available, if exploited sparingly. But it is surprising constantly and does not degenerate into mannerisms; always unanticipated, accelerating and braking with joy-ride virtuosity. The poems of Behind the State Capitol and their lay-out, make sound sense after this -- and these are decidedly poems, not texts; presences, presences more deranging than anything deconstructional priestcraft might contrive. They switch rapidly between stately and complete maquillage, and a seething of constituents, of proper names threatening to obliterate the lineaments of the made-up face:

> Where was I as Greta Garbo? Where had my
> house gone, my clothes, my books surely
> I could find a studio somewhere but, no,
> only a good friend provided hollow

shelter against a curious traveller, Pauline Rothschild
Buried in name and a career, Hollywood created, Lucille-style
as Jeanne Brinkman, Rudolph Joseph Aloysius BARtlett
Jean HARLOw
how broke shell without a dime, without a surplus Army
and Navy Snyder
secondhd Norma Jean Monroe?[4]

Recorded, Wieners passes the date of expiry as names and phrases cram the breath, and the capitalized fragments of names above can be heard as drawn-out gasps, as pauses for inspiration.

Yet a George F. Butterick, sitting on piles of stone books, strictures in a recent Sulfur[5] that something has happened to "a certain rough genius", "a naivete" which had once tickled the professor: "Lines are broken or suspended without any gain in rhythm. Even worse, words are now divided -- broken, really -- without any necessary or perceivable advantage, including two- and three-letter words" (the accents of moral revulsion are unmistakable; very like a displacement from disgust less admissible). He cites a passage of 'Children of the Working Class' in support of the accusation, stuttering passion reminiscent of The Who's 'My Generation' and about as indeterminate in rhythm. By quotation, he self-condemns spectacularly on the counts of both ear and understanding, as again here:

> There is, for instance, the misplaced emphasis on the isolate "the" in the following passage that is not permitted in the earlier version:
>
> there are worse, whom you may never see, non-crucial around
> the
> spoke, these you do, seldom ...

Well, "spoke" is spoof metonymy for The Hub (Boston), but also is what is spoke and spoken about, and cannot be and is not. The dreadful hesitancy preceding "spoke" is no arbitrary jerk of typography, but the duplicity of John Wieners as both speaker and, qua psychiatric patient, the always spoken for. And it denies eternity

to the present dispensation, no God's logos, not the definite article at all. Neither this poem, nor this article, since about "the / spoke" so many spokes radiate, if he and I are not mis-spoke. But might be, for it is in the end, presence terrorized by textuality, a condition Behind the State Capitol writhes and threshes to evade:

> Oh yes, the day will come when America's martyrs
> surrender the effects of liberty no more for copy.
>
> Settling well earned laurels aghast the legal masonry
> Relating of course privately of textual similarity
> beset from arrest, abduction, amnesia, murder and false sentences
> apology as a dear sacrifice out of form in referred harmony.[6]

Contract law is here identified, with slashing perspicacity, as the real motive of the current obsession with text, its bottom-line-bible. Certainly it is true in capitalist contract democracy, individuals are no more than textual intersections, "copy" in the sense of eternal return, held to the letter of the law. How caustic the ambiguity of "false sentences" whose perpetrator is handed down the false sentence time and again till "apology" and suitable damages, "apology" at the start of the line redeeming the previous "false sentence" in clang-association with the relentless "referred harmony" of the previous 44 lines. "A dear sacrifice" indeed, "out of form", for form is neither "copy" nor "referred harmony", but correctly and strictly managed by the sculpture of "arrest, abduction, amnesia, murder and false sentences" as the first false sentence sets in train. To surrender this "for copy" is an insult, to employ the pivotal Wieners word.

Behind the State Capitol is dense with such riches; so refractively from the perpetual return of 'Necromancy' excerpted above, slenders the prophetic strain of the poet bringing news, or rather, beginning to make news. So the smug swing of 'It Was Yours' in its first version:

> I'm a bigtime baby now
> with a place all to my own
> and a refrigerator light

suffers invasion by the trappings of success:

> I'm a New York City PEter-pris Pulitzer bigtime baby now
> with a place all to my very own
> and a Cape Cod gambril refrigerator light [7]

-- is swathed in place-names that place satirically before going to efface whoever made it there; and a typographical error in the first version ("mose" for "some") has been lit upon by a drawling bitch voice for delighted expansion to "genealogical morale, mores". How nice this genealogy of the wealthy nonentity's "morale, mores" in accident of paternity! Such signals are at once serious and comical, when no version lapses or can claim precedence -- or is the cut earlier verse, against the page, Adamite in its sure lineaments? And subsumption into Behind the State Capitol (which is a single poem), eventual and transvestite? How then can the eye resist another flutter; it may slide to the page opposite, to 'R & R Sack', a scabrously funny lament of an economic colonialist that winds up in the discourse of John Donne, a transvestitism that also unwraps the colonialism of the conceit, expansive to encompass that world expanding in galleys. But the staggering inclusiveness of Behind the State Capitol is of a different order; produced in an America where anything can be exchanged for anything else except the real stakes -- Communion, Gender, Throne ("Jacqueline Fitzgerald Kennedy Onassis-Richmond"), Family, Freedom --, it is the reversal of these signs that Wieners instigates while masquerading as celebrant of disposability and substitution, through a sea of rubbish, bric-a-brac of the Nation's unconscious. Out of the disregarded and out-of-date, the tawdry and unacceptable, the failed, this reversal conjures a non-fetishised art. Wieners' drag shakes the tyranny of both poles, generally: Behind the State Capitol surpasses the micro-level successes of Modernist poetry (for all the great structures and adventures). It is an enormity, a true transgression: the complete reprehension.

1 from 'The Lights in Town', Behind the State Capitol: Or Cincinnati Pike, Boston, The Good Gay Poets, 1975, p. 96. These lines strike me as sharply double-edged.

2 from 'A Superficial Estimation of an English Lady, a Mexican Lady, a California Lady, a New York Lady, a "Polynesian" Lady & a Massachusetts Lady', Adventures in Poetry 11 (Spring 1974), New York.

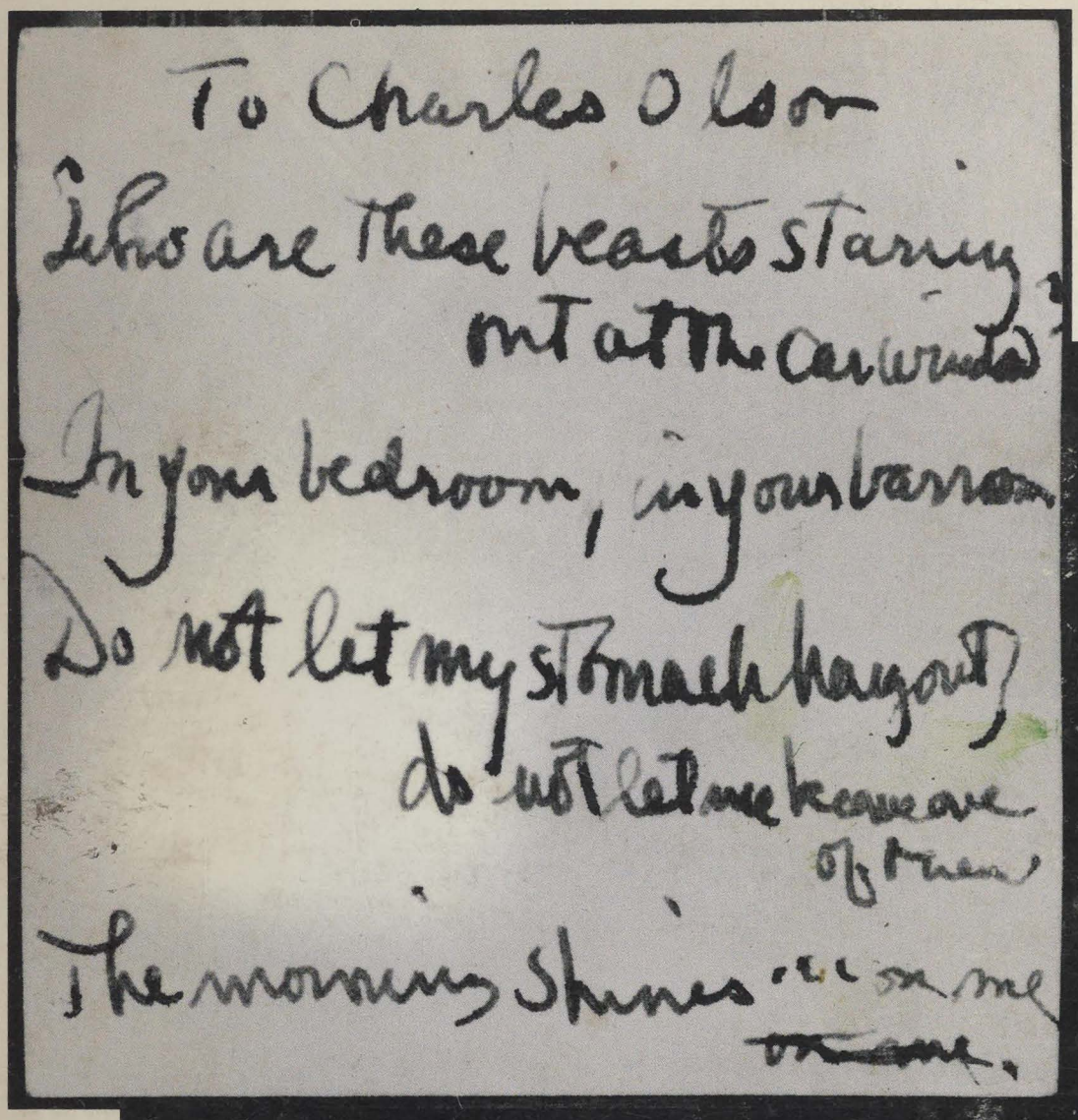
3 'Excerpt from MEMORIES IN A SMALL APARTMENT' (recorded St. Mark's Church, New York, Feb. 13th 1974), included in Disconnected, The Dial-a-Poem Poets, Giorno Poetry Systems GPS 003.

4 from 'Trying to Forget', Behind the State Capitol, p. 72.

5 George F. Butterick, 'Editing Postmodern Texts', Sulfur 11, UCLA 1984.

6 from 'Necromancy', Behind the State Capitol, p. 114.

7 1st version in Athanor 3 (Summer/Fall 1972), Clarkson NY, p. 52; 2nd in Behind the State Capitol, p. 39.


To Charles Olson
Who are these beasts staring
out at the car window?
In your bedroom, in your barroom
Do not let my stomach hang out,
do not let me become one
of them!
The morning shines in on me.

To Charles Olson

Who are these beasts staring out at the car window
In your bedroom, in your barroom
Do not let my stomach hang out, do not let me become one of them
The morning shines in on me.